DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 102 663 95 EA 006 784

AUTHOR DeTurk, Philip H.
TITLE P.S. 2001: The Story of the Pasadena Alternative School.
INSTITUTION Massachusetts Univ., Amherst. School of Education.; Phi Delta Kappa, Bloomington, Ind.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 143p.; In cooperation with National Alternative Schools Program
AVAILABLE FROM Phi Delta Kappa, 8th and Union, Bloomington, Indiana 47401 ($4.95)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$6.97 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Alternative Schools; Community Involvement; *Educational Alternatives; *Educational Change; Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; *Learning Processes; Racially Balanced Schools; Relevance (Education); School Community Relationship; School Environment; School Integration; *School Planning; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS California; *Pasadena

ABSTRACT

This book is written to help the reader avoid some of the problems that the Pasadena school system and community experienced during the evolution of an alternative program. It leads one through a developmental process in the evolution of an alternative school that started in the spring of 1972. The school has grown to 600 students in 30 months and has more applicants than it can accept. The enrollment, which includes students ranging in age from four to eighteen, meets established quotas to give it an ethnic balance. (Author/MLP)

ED102663

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P.S. 2001

The Story of The Pasadena Alternative School

By Philip H. DeTurk
In Cooperation with the
National Alternative Schools Program

EA 006 784

[1974]

Phi Delta Kappa
Bloomington, Indiana

Foreword by
Ramon Cortines
Pasadena Superintendent of Schools

Foreword

There is a need!

There is a need in public, private, and parochial education to provide learning opportunities that are meaningful, worthwhile, and realistic for the world in which the learner is going to live as an adult. There are too few educators, communities, parent groups, and agencies within the community which are willing to address themselves to the learner's need. This book is about the struggles, successes, and trials of a community, a public school system, and parents who wanted to do a little more than just "screw off the top of the kid's head, pour in information, and have the kid regurgitate back the information." It is a book about a community and a public school system which attempted to diagnose the learner's needs and provide the proper learning situation for their students, with the appropriate community, parent, and student involvement.

This book is written, I hope, to help the reader avoid some of the problems that our public school system and our community endured during the evolution of the alternative program in Pasadena. We have all heard that children and young people learn in different ways. The goals need to be the same but methods and techniques used to involve them in the learning process need to be different. Seldom do we address ourselves to providing learning opportunities for the diversity of children and young people who come to our public, private, and parochial schools.

This book leads one through a developmental, sequential process in the evolution of an alternative school. In reading the printed as well as the unprinted words in this book, one can avoid some of the situations that were unpleasant but necessary and important to the growth and development of alternative programs and an alternative school in the Pasadena Unified School District. The lessons and the struggles of sharing, participation by parents, students, the University of Massachusetts, and the community have made many of us, who are still in the community and school system, more open and secure both personally and professionally, noting our limitation, weaknesses, and strengths.

The book is a personal book—not stereotyped—and indeed education should be personal. It does not suggest that the type of alternative school it deals with is the one for your community and your school, but indeed, it suggests that educators and school communities have a responsibility to provide the diversity of learning styles. In making that provision, it may be often painful and devastating, but so rewarding for those students, parents, and staff who are involved in the process.

The Pasadena Unified School District now has many alternative programs and several alternative schools, which I believe are providing a better education for the diversity of children in our community because of the experiences which this book recaptures.

Raymond Cortines
Superintendent of Schools
Pasadena Unified School District

The project presented or reported herein was performed pursuant to a Grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Office of Education, and no official endorsement by the U.S. Office of Education should be inferred.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to recognize the National Alternative Schools Program at the University of Massachusetts School of Education, which made the experience and the book possible; Greta Pruitt, the director who provided mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to the school; Bob Sinclair, who helped write Chapter Two and otherwise offered support; Dwight Allen, who provided the theory and the opportunity; Jim Compeau, who provided day-by-day nourishment and Chapters 10 and 11; Ray Cortines, who risked his own integrity and held me and my family up in the tough times; and Barbara, who lived through bitterness with devotion, strength and faith in what really mattered—our love together.

To about fifty kids, and then many more, and their parents, who opened the door and taught us the meaning of nobility.

PREFACE

My attempt in this book has been to underline and undermine theory with practical experience. It would be nice to say that in developing an alternative school in Pasadena we laid out a theory, then implemented it, and then revised it. Unfortunately, we didn't. We dreamed, scrambled, gamed, philosophized, swore, winged, stumbled, and lucked out—in no particular order. Like the development process, this book is similarly disorganized, the difference being that the disorganization is intended in order to show the three-dimensional zigzag of reality rather than the linear logic of PERT. One teacher in the Pasadena school district, when asked what he would like an alternative school to be, said, "I'd like to see a school of organized chaos." We delivered on the noun, but lacked the wisdom for the adjective. I hope this book can do better.

Above all, I hope this book will reveal greater hope for the future of schooling in this country. As I crawl from the inner guts of the school to the mountain top and back again, my attempt is always to say, "We must change the entire framework of schooling by flipping it 180° and turning it inside out." At least this may be one way whereby schooling can have a beautiful influence on the children of a twenty-first century and a lasting influence on the twenty-first century of our children.

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1

THE MONUMENTAL PROBLEM OF SCHOOLING

A six-year-old in Pasadena said about his alternative school, "I like people that are nice. The people here are nice." When asked what suggestions he had for next year, he quickly responded, "Everybody be nice." All the words written about teaching and learning for the next one hundred years might not say more than those three words—spoken by a four-month expert on alternative schools.

And yet *nice* is exactly what we in education most often are not. In our frantic effort to appear composed in a roller-coaster world, we have become victims of our own technology. We have lost our humaneness. We have lost our ability to accept differences and to provide choices. Children have only one choice: school. School—that playworld designed and maintained by teachers, principals, parents, boards, commissioners, programs, curricula, and clocks.

The institution of school has been left at the starting gate in the race of change. It is as impotent as a candle or a collection of candles trying to light a city. The city has outgrown its need for schools except for an occasional reflection on mythological romance. Sadly, in a new society with new myths, school buildings, school books, and school teachers have little place.

I had a high school mathematics teacher who, when angered, would slam a desk drawer and facetiously announce, "I'm just like a barber. All you have to do is bring in the head and I'll learn you." Many educators are saying the same thing today, with one slight change. They are ***deadly*** serious!

Schools have lost much of their meaning because they have come to exist for the satisfaction of employees rather than consumers. Student curriculum is determined by teacher interest and teacher competence. Student rules are determined by teacher and administrative tolerance. The amount of planning for students, judgment of teacher competence, size and nature of student groups, even the times students can be in "their" schools, are all determined by teachers and organizations of teachers.

Education and discipline, which are really self-development activities, have been translated by schools into other-directed activities. What is learned must be taught. The math teacher said it all: "You bring in the head; I'll learn you."

Many things about school from the tyranny of grades to the liberalism of individualized *instruction* suggests that the school is teacher-oriented, not student-oriented. Many students and parents have accepted without question the validity of unrelated teachable fragments often referred to as "basic skills." English, algebra, spelling, linguistics, and history are each little bags of medicine to be administered by a teacher at his convenience. They are relatively easy to teach, easy to measure, and, incidentally, easy to learn. The schooling conspiracy has been so pervasive and so successful in its appearance and its measurable, though irrelevant, results that almost everyone has accepted its seductive structure.

One teacher who is designing an alternative school for 200 high school students has found that her greatest challenge is convincing not the other teachers, administrators, or parents but the students involved. They are not at all eager to accept aesthetics, human sensitivity, and morality as parts of the curriculum. As she said, "Eliminating the regular forty-five minute chunks is taking away their security blankets."

The emphasis is on absorbing material into the brain whether or not the brain is receptive or in need. The logistics of schooling make it impossible for the teacher to direct every student's intravenous flow. But there are convincing technological answers to that problem—instructional objectives and programmed instruction. Instructional (or behavioral) objectives are not objectives at all; they are regulators, evaluators. They indicate to the teacher (when the teacher is available) if the student has assimilated the required material. Programmed instruction booklets and machines are juiced up with variable media for learning, pretest-posttest evaluations, nonsequenced packets, and vocational subjects, but the theme is the same—

stuff it in and make it *look* real. In organizational terms, we are still touting the efficiency expert. How to do it better is often the quest, not *why* it is being done. The criteria for "quality education" are clearly accountability, cost per student, and teacher-student ratio, not pupils' growth as competent learners.

The teacher thus determines behavior, sometimes by proxy. Students are not trusted or believed capable of finding their own food, preparing it, or eating it. All they can do is regurgitate it and *that* only according to teacher instructions. A subtle damage incurred during this process is that it sets a model for young people. That is, it trains people not to act unless told and to let Big Daddy make all the decisions. Teachers (also victims of the monster) are neither acting nor deciding. They are going through the mechanical motions, passing on the old mythology. J. Abner Pettiwell says it well in *Saber Tooth Curriculum*, "They do have something they call education but it is just a collection of traditional activities, a machine which they worship for its own sake."

Since the pattern is eternally repetitive, the administrator has no decisions to make. He must only maintain the system, keep up its appearances. He is the Mr. Joyboy whose job it is to keep the Loved One looking well even though it has been in a horrible accident. He keeps attendance, directs the traffic flow, reports to the parents, supervises the lunch, checks the lesson plans, guards the supplies, and directs the penal system.

Educational Taxidermy

Philip Jackson says that "school is a place where things often happen not because students want them to, but because it is time for them to occur." John Holt remarks that in the typical classroom children are too busy to think. "When you have acres of paper to fill up with pencil marks, you have no time to waste on the luxury of thinking." What do children do in school? Mostly, they work in, or read books. Silberman writes:

> . . . if one looks at what actually goes on in the classroom—the kinds of texts students read and the kind of homework they are assigned, as well as the nature of classroom discussion and the kinds of tests teachers give—he will discover that the great bulk of student's time is still devoted to detail, most of it trivial, much of it factually incorrect, and almost all of it unrelated to any concept, structure, cognitive strategy or indeed anything other than the lesson plan. It is rare to find anyone—teacher, principal, supervisor, or superintendent—who has asked why he is teaching what he is teaching.

In one urban school, I watched a young teacher corpsman teach a class of second graders for forty minutes. The students were inner city, disadvantaged black and white children in a special program that stressed self-identity, interpersonal relations, and, above all, enjoyment. The subject of the lesson was *nouns and verbs*. The coordinating teacher for the team, an educator with nineteen years of experience, sat with me at the back of the room. After several futile efforts at abstractly defining nouns and verbs, the young teacher solicited sentences from the class. The one chosen for analysis was, "I watched a mystery on TV last night." The teacher asked the class, "Which word is the noun?" Agonizingly, he went through each random suggestion from the class, eliminating that particular word as a possibility. As "night," "TV," and "mystery" were rejected, I began to see the direction. The choice now rested between "I" and "watched." Another attempt was made at abstraction. "One of them is *the most important thing*." No luck. "One is *something that happens*." Answer: "mystery." Eventually, an abstracted voice murmured, "watched." The teacher, recognizing the opening, quickly added, "Right," circled the "watched," underlined "I," and announced, "So *that's the noun*."

The coordinating teacher smiled approval. When she was asked why second-grade children were "learning" parts of speech, she responded that nouns and verbs were in the guidelines that she had been using for nineteen years. She then proudly displayed the many materials she had sent for and accumulated, which helped children distinguish the parts of speech. When the principal was later asked about the classroom experience, she responded, "We did away with those guidelines last year. There are plenty of new materials available; all they have to do is ask." Minutes later, she caught up with me and, showing me the "old" guidelines said, "See, nouns and verbs are for fourth-grade students."

Many, many questions can be asked about this situation, but one very obvious one is, "Why are they doing what they are doing?" Schooling is often a series of these 45-minute episodes, which not only permit students to learn incorrect material, but force them to learn how to learn incorrectly. Holt writes:

> In many ways, we break down children's convictions that things make sense, or their hope that things may prove to make sense. We do it, first of all, by breaking up life into arbitrary and disconnected hunks of subject matter . . . Furthermore, we continually confront them with what is senseless, ambiguous, and contradictory; worse we do it without knowing that we are doing it, so that, hearing nonsense shoved at them as if it were sense, they come to feel that the source of their confusion lies not in the material but in their own stupidity.

The material becomes sanctified. Students and subject matter are treated as two separate entities, each developed independently but constantly exposed to each other, like two trains on adjacent tracks. This belief leads to certain assumptions about packaging, sequencing, and grading of material. Implicit is the assumption that there *are* subjects: science, foreign language, math, social studies, English, and that these subjects are non-negotiable, sanctified, and hierarchial in importance. For people who make this assumption, math is more important than silver-smithing, French is more important than street language, literature is more important than television, European history is more important than typing or the assassination of a Nobel prize winner. Moreover, it is assumed that curriculum design means organizing subjects and teachers as though they are empty boxes or railroad cars, waiting for children to fill them up, on the rationale that *the children need the subject matter.* And this process is actually on visible display in scheduling rooms in almost every school in the country. It is demonstrated every spring by guidance counselors and color-coded boards.

Support for these priorities comes from the general assumption that education is "provided to" students to "prepare for." We hear that college students are dumber than they were; that potential business executives cannot write a simple letter; that store clerks cannot add; that mechanics are slipshod; that high school graduates cannot read; that a large percentage of students is not only unemployable but untrainable; that young people today want everything done for them; that they are lazy, illiterate, morally deprived, violent, valueless, and not interested in making a decent living. The argument often goes, "When I call for someone to come fix a leaky pipe or, more to the point, an infected spleen, I want someone who knows what he is doing. What is education doing if it isn't preparing students to do a worthwhile job?" More English, foreign language, math, social studies, and science is the ready answer. The assembly line procedure that magically turns its treadmill objects into executive sentence writers, plumbers, surgeons, college freshmen, and industrious, moral millionaires at the other end of the production line is a well-protected mystery. That mystery is apparently the pearl within the "art of teaching" and the reason why some teachers insist that no one can judge the effectiveness of the classroom teacher!

The "provided curriculum" notion assumes that what is learned must be taught, and taught by certified personnel who have themselves been "prepared for." They must plan everything, direct everything, "teach" everything, observe everything, review everything, and test everything (every other seat), and then do everything again just to

make sure. In some cases (like punctuation rules, photosynthesis, and the Civil War), it is done every three or four years to prevent escape.

Math, science, English, social studies, and foreign languages become the curricula because they are what teachers know. If a teacher is familiar with spelunking, group process skills, witchcraft, or selling used cars, he might like to teach in those areas, but he can't, because he can't be certified in spelunking, used cars, witchcraft, or group process. It really has to be math, science, English, foreign language, and social studies. And to suggest that a student might learn something that no teacher knows or can teach is not an acceptable consideration. Even if a student writes a paper on rock and the drug culture or witchcraft in the twentieth century, he gets corrected for spelling, punctuation, unity, cohesiveness, and penmanship. The person and the interest are really secondary. They are part of a separate train on another track.

Education has emphasized extrinsic rewards and penalties to the detriment of intrinsic reward. Ironically, the hope of children learning how to learn is shut out by substituting a barrage of extrinsic pressures. Ingeniously, students pursue their own intrinsic rewards since they are not obtained and acknowledged by the system. They beat the system and also defeat most of the good intentions of the professional staff by praising failures, honoring truancy and misbehavior, breaking rules, delighting in proving the teacher wrong, cheating, undermining class instruction, and destroying property. All of these acts of espionage provide a kind of intrinsic sense of accomplishment that counteracts the intended effect of systematic reward and punishment.

Students and teachers can't learn or teach anything if their minds are cluttered with scores of "subjects"—present, past, and future. With all the other duties to consider, a teacher is more likely to look like a railroad conductor, a timekeeper, and a dispensing machine than a humane advisor of learners. The great concerns for disciplines, for getting everything done, and for getting everyone in his proper place are apt to add the role of policeman to the teacher's schizophrenia. The school becomes preoccupied with absolute control and lack of noise and movement in order to get things done, but the result is neither control nor things getting done. Instead of being a friend and a resource to children, the teacher becomes a part of the woodwork.

Student grouping for efficient learning is a dubious process. Although it may facilitate some kinds of teaching, it works against some kinds of learning. Students are organized by age and ability rather than by specialized interest or natural selection. No other organization groups its members in such a way that each is expected to contribute the same thing. Interest, differentiation, and natural affinity are usually

the criteria for grouping elsewhere. As has been pointed out in many studies, ability grouping tends to widen the ability gap. Thus, students who are initially low in ability become progressively lower in comparison to their more favored peers. Silberman writes:

> Certainly administrative procedures like automatic promotion, homogeneous grouping, racial segregation, or selective admission to higher education affect "citizenship education" more profoundly than does the social studies curriculum. And children are taught a host of lessons about values, ethics, morality, character, and conduct every day of the week, less by the content of the curriculum than by the way schools are organized, the ways teachers and parents behave, the way they talk to children and to each other, the kinds of behavior they approve or reward and the kinds they disapprove or punish. These lessons are far more powerful than the verbalizations that accompany them and that they frequently controvert.

As an assistant principal, I had the opportunity to hear many complaints from teachers and students. One day an outraged teacher stormed into the office with what she explained was a "punishment essay" given in study hall written by a boy the principals knew only too well.

Courtesy in Study Halls

You should always be courteous in study halls because it is unfair to the "goody-goody" kids who are soft and never fool around or have any fun at all.

And its supposedly unfair to the teachers who just walk around and talk to each other. The teachers that refuse simple requests for kids with a "bad reputation". Yet grant these requests for the "goody-goody kids" without thinking twice. If they here a noise, before you know it there putting entire blame on some of those "bad" kids. If a "goody-goody" kid is fooling around the teacher will call his name softly. But if a teacher sees a "bad" kid she will screech his name at the top of her lungs and without further adoo send him directly to the office. If these teachers who are "ladies", and I use the term losely, pick on both the goody-goody and the bad kids she shouldn't "pick on" either.

Another complaint of mine is the lack of consistancy of the teacher one day she'll just yell at you the next she will give you detention.

If the teachers cease nonconsistency & unfairness you can be sure the kids will reform.

If schools are to encourage learning how to learn, they must tolerate—even encourage—failure. In this way, learning becomes a creative art, not a parroting one. Creativity involves risk. The creative base runner will attempt to steal home. The creative quarterback will

pass from his end zone. George S. Pullman, having completed his invention, the sleeping car, was told by the railroad men that it was unacceptable because it was too high to go through tunnels and too wide to fit in railway stations. His reply was, "Change the railroads." And they did!

Learning takes risks and creativity, but as Holt says, "We destroy this capacity above all by making (children) afraid, afraid of not doing what other people want, of not pleasing, of making mistakes, of failing, of being *wrong*." We simply are not nice.

Schools recognize failure not with smiling shrugs, stimulating new avenues, or congratulating "nice tries;" they punish failure with low grades, which incur penalties at home; with staying after school; with lowering chances for college admission or job placement; with demotion; and with physical or psychological segregation in the "dummy class." As Holt and Glasser and others feel so deeply, schools create stupid kids. Equally wrong, they produce "smart kids," kids who receive favors, unequal treatment, and elitist attitudes that widen the segregation gap.

Schools are monuments. They were built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for a society that thirsted for information and literacy. Out of that simple beginning of a rare group of locally appointed masters who were minimally trained and itinerant has grown a profession of well over two million men and women who thirst for employment in a structure shaped to their satisfaction. It is time that we started thinking about people and being nice. It is time we spent less time on the dead heroes and hieroglyphics of history—that cemetery of dates and places—and more time on the lives of children, for they are with us today and they *are* tomorrow. It is time we told the owners to change the railroad!

2

ROSES, LITTLE OLD LADIES IN SNEAKERS, AND SCHOOL BUSING

There is something funny going on in Pasadena. One morning, when we were residing temporarily in the city, our trash was not collected. It was my fault. I had parked the car in the driveway the previous night, thereby blocking the garbage truck from providing its weekly service. The next morning my wife, after a terse brouhaha with me in the kitchen, apologetically called the sanitation department wondering what could be done. Within ten minutes a truck appeared from some place and white-uniformed men quickly emptied our garbage cans! From sanitation to parades to education, Pasadena prides itself on maintaining services and values that are often missing in our contemporary and more equivocal world. The ghetto is invisible, and showplaces are everywhere. The lawns, streets, buildings, and people are scrupulously manicured.

Pasadena boasts of prestigious Cal Tech, futuristic jet propulsion labs, and lush Huntington Gardens, a sprawling floral fairyland. The elegant shops are populated with Porsches, poodles, fur coats, and even occasional tennis shoes. The papier maché mountains are glorious one day but mysteriously gone the next. Every New Year's Day, Colorado Avenue and Orange Grove provide a petaled pathway for an unbelievable parade of dreamlike floats that quickly wilt into memory.

This tinseled retreat for little old ladies, situated at the headwaters of California's first freeway, the community known everywhere as the City of Roses, has recently gained notoriety in other ways. For

just as the smog is blotting out the sparkling San Gabriel mountains, the rush of urban overflow from neighboring Los Angeles is changing the nature of the population. Underneath all the glitter of Pasadena is a turbulent struggle for identity among people of different political persuasions and people of different races.

It was this mixture of surface glamour and volcanic rumble that brought forth a court order by Judge Manuel Real in January, 1970. The government had "selected" Pasadena as one of the first cities outside the South to desegregate its schools. Suddenly, the citizens and the schools found themselves in a different kind of spotlight struggling to devise a plan that would equitably distribute its 49 percent Anglo and 51 percent "minority" student population. A plan that intelligently compromised the idea of neighborhood schools with the necessity of massive busing was initiated nine months later.

The reaction brought about an organized attempt to recall the school board members who supported the Pasadena Plan. The recall was narrowly defeated, but racial incidents and student morale continued to be problematical. While many citizens vigorously fought for racial balance and others flew to white reservations, a silent majority waited for the next election.

Twenty-five hundred miles east, the National Alternative Schools Program had been created at the University of Massachusetts. The school of education there had acquired a national reputation. It was known for educational innovation, for proficiency at grantsmanship, and for some imaginative and demonstrated change strategies. Impetus to this activity was supplied by the peripatetic, showboating, and intellectually challenging leadership of Dwight Allen, a contemporary giant in educational thought and action.

His frustrating experiences in inducing school reform through flexible scheduling, differentiated staffing, and other sound but often abused ideas had led him to the conclusion that change must be total, and that it cannot be by consensus. Reform must include simultaneous revisions in curriculum, organization, and staffing by a group of parents, teachers, and students who have volunteered to accept massive change and the accompanying risk.

At a meeting one evening in Dwight Allen's house, a small group of proteges discussed the creation of a new strategy for change, and soon thereafter the National Alternative Schools Program was born. In the early months of life of the new child, we predicted a future of impossible dreams, and we were busily seeking school districts to share those dreams. We searched for a commitment to total change, an act of will, which would revitalize, not destroy, the life of schooling. At the selected sites, schools were to be developed jointly by local

school systems and by the school of education at the University of Massachusetts.

While establishing some relationships within the state, we also trained our sights on the rest of the country. Because of some prior contacts with Pasadena, because some people there had voiced interest in the concept, and because both the university and the district could enhance their national postures by collaboration, the vision of an alternative school in Pasadena was very exciting.

Between September and December, 1971, a steering committee representing the two institutions drew up proposals that were accepted in late December by the two administrations. During the month of January, students were recruited, a staff was patched together, a site was found, codirectors were chosen, a budget was determined, and a hundred or so other details were attended to or, more likely, were *not* attended to. During this time, the Pasadena School District and the university were vying for money, special dispensations, influence, and control. All was not sweet, but the aroma of some distant and stately pleasure dome momentarily erased the scorns of rivalry and the pangs of indefinite and inadequate solutions to immediate problems. That longsightedness caused serious difficulties later on. The areas least attended to during this brief preparation time—management, staffing, curriculum, facilities, and evaluation—became significant weaknesses that nearly cost the school its young life.

The staff of the school had less than a week to get together before school began in February. This meager acquaintance period proved to be so disastrous that less than half of the original staff was left three months later. Six months after beginning, only one of the twelve originals remained! Lack of trust and confidence, unfamiliar styles, vacillating leadership, inadequate role definition, confused lines of authority, and just plain lousy interpersonal relations caused a situation of continual frustration, lack of commitment, temerity, and an attitude of doom. Although better management and staff development during the school term might have averted this near disaster, it was the lack of preparation and team-building time before school began that presented the greatest difficulty. These staffing inadequacies couched in a context of a university-district power struggle, a changing community, a mass of very vocal parents, and an unprecedented approach to the education of children set the stage for a romantic battle with windmills.

Little planning had been done for a school curriculum, and the staff with all its other problems was not able to make up the handicap. Actually, it was honestly believed that the school members (staff, students, and parents) would be able to determine their own school

program. Curriculum planning was, thus, purposely omitted. Curriculum planning itself, in other words, was expected to be an integral part of the curriculum. The reality of the situation was that a new staff, unfamiliar parents, and fifty students coming from school backgrounds where there was very little decision making, could not begin to cope with this complex function. As one student said, "Suddenly asking students to plan a school is impossible. They are not up to it, and their lack of response caused the staff to turn off on other things." As another wrote, "the pressure (should) be eased little by little so as not to have the side effects of shock freedom."

The school facilities looked good on paper. The site was pleasant, open, and well located. But as it turned out, the space available was not nearly adequate, nor were the materials and equipment. We had not fully acknowledged that the more flexible and diverse the school program is, the greater are the demands placed on space and supplies.

Finally, the new school had little idea how it was going to be evaluated or how to evaluate itself. Experience in Pasadena and elsewhere has shown that about three or four months of mistakes are needed in an alternative school followed by a substantial gap of time when the plant shuts down and bold alterations are made. In this case, the Pasadena school had no scheduled time to make this adjustment before a critical outside judgment was made.

But despite these appalling failures, the school has been successful. It started with fifty students and has grown to 600 in thirty months with many times this number of applicants. The enrollment met pre-established quotas to give it an ethnic balance. The students were spaced over an age range of four through eighteen. Small and large, black and white, girls and boys, all were first grouped together in three rooms, which had previously served as a kindergarten suite. They and their dedicated parents took full advantage of their unique opportunity to create an alternative.

And so, cast against a backdrop of schooling U.S.A. as we know it today, this book will describe how a particular and unique alternative school was built teardrop by heartache, or smile, by love, by life. As one student commented after a year and a half, "When I first came to the alternative school in the spring of '72, I thought I was very lucky to have been chosen for the first enrollment. But I did not realize how much my life could be changed."

A parent summed it up for many:

> . . . something amazing and unprecedented has happened in the established system of education in Pasadena. A public school board has been willing—and what is more, given an allotment of teachers and funds and site—to let

an educational experiment take place which departs from regular school standards. Acting in good faith, the school board has said in effect, "Go ahead, and try a new approach to learning." This is a real milestone for all of us who have been discouraged by traditional teaching methods. We have gotten to base one, a chance to try something different . . . . The eyes of Pasadena are upon us.

What is left of the story is the subject of this book—the Pasadena Alternative School from concept to reality.

3

CHANGING THE SCHOOLS: IMPROVEMENT THROUGH CHOICE

Although George Pullman's treatment of employees was indefensible, his creativity had a profound influence on the nation. In permitting coast-to-coast travel, it opened new horizons for the railroads and for people who were eager to learn about and use our vast resources.

Some interesting similarities exist between railroad thinking and school thinking. Railroads have track systems, trains, and cars. Schools have track systems, schools, and grades. Railroads have compartments, and they follow each other in sequenced order, never imagining that a change in order could be possible. In many trains, all seats face front, and although some daring bridge players rearrange the seating, someone working for the railroad always returns all seats to their natural order by morning.

Railroad cars have conductors who take tickets, keep the aisles free of traffic, announce schedules, and forbid passengers to stand between trains. Railroads also have engineers. The engineers have absolutely no hand in choosing destinations; their mindless mission has been decreed by the system. They can only speed up, slow down, make prescheduled stops, and make sure the track is clear.

People arrange their missions to fit railroad schedules. The countryside is rearranged so that life goes under, over, or waits for the railroad. The railroad never adjusts itself to the country. There are two criteria of evaluation for railroads—that people arrive unmaimed and that people arrive on time! It takes a strong will and a strong imagination to say, "Change the railroads!" The irony is that the railroads no

longer need changing. Because of cars, trucks, and air travel, railroads have become almost useless. We wonder if there is still time to change the schools.

An alternative school was conceived in Pasadena at a time when very, very few public school systems were considering this kind of undertaking. Even while negotiations between the University of Massachusetts and the school district administration in Pasadena were in process, we were contemplating the meaning and the philosophy of the concept "alternative school." In July, 1971, I began putting my ideas on paper. With the help of friend and colleague, Bob Sinclair, this chapter was completed two years later—an indication of the complexity of the dramatic change being proposed.

Meaning of Alternative School

An alternative school is *a community of learners who have chosen a different means of satisfying their educational desires.* Several elements in this statement deserve elaboration.

The word "community" connotes a communal process. The outcomes of the enterprise are beneficial to a group as well as to an individual. "Community" also suggests young and old, black and white, professional and neophyte. A community or unity is created by the inclusion, not the exclusion, of diversity. Finally, "community" suggests common ownership or common law. It promotes minority viewpoint and questions hierarchial mandate.

The phrase "community of learners" indicates an elimination of superficial and counterproductive role distinctions. All participants share the desire to learn and none holds a monopoly on knowledge or experience.

The word "chosen" is essential to the concept of alternative school. It *is* the alternative. Alternative schools exist only because individuals have chosen them. The word "chosen" challenges the public school agendas of universality, compulsoriness, nonnegotiability, and noncontroversialism. Participants in joining or creating an alternative school have initially and dramatically made a significant choice. The opportunity for choice continues to be essential throughout the alternative educational experience.

The words "different means" emphasize the process and environment of educational experience. The focus is on behavior, the style and nature of learning, as well as the content and product. The uniqueness of an individual's learning style is identified and analyzed so that the way one learns is matched with an appropriate teaching

style and educational environment. This matching process is a means for learning. "Different means" suggests that getting there can be half the fun!

"Satisfying their educational desires" means an educational process centering on uniqueness, not generality. Schooling becomes a fulfilling experience as well as a preparing one. The "school" as a concept must be responsive rather than just pedagogical. The phrase further suggests that if individuals (or a "community") really intend to satisfy their educational desires, they must control the means to do it. Again, we consider the question of choice. When a person is in pain because of an aching back, he usually goes to a doctor to have the trouble diagnosed and, hopefully, relieved. All people, however, do not go to doctors. Some try their own medicines, some go to chiropractors, some visit psychoanalysts, some ignore the ache because of more pressing problems, some change jobs, some play golf, and some go to worship. In education, children and parents do not usually have varied choices to meet their needs, unless, of course, they are wealthy enough to attend private schools or poor enough not to be missed. But that choice is not much of a choice.

It is without apology that this definition has certain implied and limiting values, for it is important that the promotion of educational choice does not also permit educational carnage or chaos. The meaning of alternative school, then, suggests some fundamentally different views of schooling. What has happened within education that calls for "another school"? Certain dissatisfactions with the structure of schooling suggest that an alternative is needed.

Need For Improvement

We assume that the structure of schooling is generally recognized as resilient. Creative educational ideas in schools are usually sifted through a filter of compromise and efficiency, grinding out curricular and organizational changes that consist of disconnected little pieces shaped to an existing mold. Change in schools is analogous to a jigsaw puzzle being recut. The pieces change shape and size, but the whole remains the same. Let us look at only four fairly recent and promising ideas and their eventual form after being recut or squeezed through the system filter.

Accountability was an idea that gave hope to both educators and taxpayers. We were determined to show that failing student grades also implied certain failure for the professionals. We were determined

to show that money spent was used in the implementation of carefully planned priorities. But what is the actual outcome? School systems throughout the country are having teachers laboriously write thousands of tiny performance objectives. Each department, each school, is, in effect, justifying what it has always been doing. What has changed?

Comprehensive education was an attempt to find learning experiences and methods that would benefit *all* students. College entrance would no longer determine the entire school program. What has happened? We have added more students, more bricks, and more courses—in typesetting, auto mechanics, general business, and field trips for the disadvantaged. Instead of smart, average, and slow, our enrollment is now distributed into college prep, business, general, and special education.

Differentiated staffing once promised new organizational patterns that would utilize and compensate the differing strengths of teachers. What has happened? After a few years of fear and criticism, most systems now claim to be differentiated. They have teacher aides, interns, and learning coordinators. The aides were formerly called homeroom mothers, the interns were student teachers, and the coordinators were department heads.

Student governance and *student decision making* were the bright banners of those who said that schooling is essentially for students and for learning how to learn. What has happened? Enlightened districts have added a nonvoting student to the board of education or a choice from among eighty mini-courses offered between semesters or during the final school cleanup week.

Has the school really changed at all? Have we looked at curriculum itself as a subject? Have we looked at new ways and new people to do new things or simply different ways to do old things? Have we looked at why a business course should be taught and who should be in it? Have we looked beyond the school walls for teaching help, for subject matter, and for places to learn? Has student evaluation or student attendance regulations been questioned? Have we changed substance or have we merely changed names?

Many attempts to change *conceal* rather than correct existing inadequacies. Innovations in schools are relatively easy to make when concern is only for surface appearances—egg coloring. Efforts to change fundamental processes, properties, and structures are extremely difficult, if not impossible, when the change is attempted within an operating school (one with a regular staff, organization, accreditation, curriculum, and students). A change in one activity of the organization is overwhelmed by the influence of existing attitudes and behaviors

demonstrated by parents, students, and teachers in the remaining activities. The prevailing mode of change, therefore, is to proudly display an array of tinsel and ornaments, and to avoid disturbing the established roots of schooling.

We are suggesting that the school system has no built-in way to cope with emerging social needs and values. In fact, it has a built-in mechanism to prohibit educational improvement. This impinging mechanism consists of several interrelated gears:

—The school as a system looks inward rather than outward and thus perceives its problems as organizational rather than social.

—The school is concerned with expenditure in terms of teachers and administrators. Therefore, it looks at its enterprise as teaching rather than learning.

—The school makes major decisions on the basis of consensus—either all agree and all do the same thing, or there is no decision. Thus, small curriculum changes such as mini-courses are allowed because the major body of curriculum can remain unaffected.

—The school has little capacity for research and development. Solutions reflect what has worked best in the past, thus guaranteeing continued regression in light of new demands.

—The school does what it knows best—it teaches teaching and schooling. The gap between schooling practice on one side and the concerns of society, a new generation, future employment, and existing culture on the other grows wider.

—The school has inadequate knowledge to meet and accept criticism. It becomes defensive and devoted to maintenance and survival.

As a result of these interlocking characteristics, schools do not have the capacity to lead. If schools find it difficult to lead and adapt because of inflexible structures, then we must view the idea of improvement in more profound terms. Perhaps we are passing from an era of educational tinkering to an era of managed innovation. Innovation such as Peter Drucker defined:

> . . . the design and development of something new, as yet unknown and not yet in existence, which will establish a new economic configuration out of the old, known, existing elements. It will give these elements an entirely new economic dimension. It is the missing link between having a number of disconnected elements, each marginally effective, and an integrated system of great power.

Alternative schools can serve as a strategy for creating new structures of schooling that will promote improvement throughout public school systems.

Disturbing the established roots of schooling is a major mandate of the alternative school. The alternative school forces fundamental questions such as, "Can teachers be taught?" "Are teachers irrelevant?" "Are courses needed?" "Is a school building necessary?" "Should schooling be perpetuated?" "Where do people learn?"

In order to effectively address and ameliorate problems within the educational system, alternative schools must have certain minimum operational characteristics. The extent to which these characteristics are defined and secured is directly related to the amount of influence these schools will have. Alternative schools must be:

A regular part of and supported by the public school system.

Voluntarily attended by students and teachers.

Semi-autonomous so that experimental efforts will not adversely affect the learning experiences and smooth operation of other coexisting schools.

Sufficiently large to be significant—certainly a minimum of fifty to one hundred students.

Given ample time—at least two years—to become established.

Different from existing school structure in some definable respects.

Alternative schools are structures for improvement. Improvement does not flourish naturally in schools today. Yet we can establish change schools, schools that throw down a gauntlet, challenging the validity of what goes on in the name of schooling.

Schools today are providing adequate opportunities for some individuals. What is needed are equal or better opportunities for others. An alternative to (not an overthrow of) existing schools for certain individuals is the goal of this strategem for change. New schools growing up within, and supplementing, the public school system—without predisposition to replace, create an ideal model for, or be universally better than existing schools--hopefully will provide a learning and growing opportunity for students, teachers, and parents whose needs and interests are not presently attended to. Alternative schools will also provide recognized sounding boards or points of comparison for other schools in the system. Existing schools will improve because of the presence of alternative schools, and, in turn, alternative schools will also mature. But they will forever remain different, for they serve different people and different purposes. That difference is their reason for being. That difference also demands clear priorities of purpose and management.

Purpose and Management

The purposes of the alternative school will center on the priorities of people, learning, production, and diversity. The management of the alternative school is directed toward the priorities of planned improvement, new systems of governance, and participation through choice.

Purpose

An alternative school will be people-oriented. It will value people more than the other way around. It will strive to provide the conditions that nourish individual and institutional self-determination, not self-perpetuation.

An alternative school will attempt to be nonracist. Moreover, it will actively strive to combat existing and insidious institutional discrimination. In general, schools today are bothered with the problem of problem people. Schools tend to discriminate against students and teachers with disadvantaged social backgrounds, academic weaknesses, uncompromising attitudes, and nonconforming aspirations. Specifically, schools discriminate against minorities. While the school system generously provides some busing, some scholarships, Upward Bound, A Better Chance, and Black Studies for blacks, it continues to teach curriculum advancing racial myths. Alternative schools will deal with bigotry in several ways, including establishing a racial and ethnic balance within the school; providing for multi-ethnic consciousness and contact; questioning the reasons and anticipating the possible effects of all old and new institutional policies; and examining, eliminating, and creating curricula. Alternative schools will provide new opportunities to address the problem of institutional racism and the institutional problem of problem people.

An alternative school will be learning-oriented. It will be built on the premise that everyone has the right to learn. The school will provide pluralistic environments that promote learning competence and correct learning deficiencies by matching the student with an appropriate learning habitat. A major part of that process is gaining the ability to make distinctions and choices. To gain that ability, however, the learner must be presented with optional routes, some of which may result in negative achievement. The alternative school will probably be a high-risk operation. Students and schools will learn to experience failure without the threat of penalty. They will create mechanisms to accept and learn from failure. Grading, reduction

of error, neatness, control, and order will not be so totally pervasive and other-directed as they are in most schools today.

Authority in the alternative school becomes less absolute and more existential. Old role distinctions are erased. Teachers are no longer the only source of knowledge; principals are no longer the sole fountains of decision. Teaching becomes a function, responsive to a particular learning act; it is not a person or a separately learned skill. A *teacher*, then, is a person who, in addition to teaching, also learns, listens, advises, works with, produces. A person *is taught by* teachers, students, other adults, materials, situations, chance, and himself. The implications of this redefinition of teaching for school organization and teacher training are deep and vast.

Alternative schools will be creating environment as well as reacting to the conventional press of the environment. They will provide what social psychologist Karl Weick terms a "proactive experience." In alternative schools, enacting the environment may be the central purpose. Rather than passive reaction to a ready-made school environment, students, parents, and teachers will themselves be creating the learning climate to which they adapt, a creative process that will continually be reaccomplished or reenacted.

An alternative school will be production-oriented. Schools ordinarily thrive on consumption. They are measured in terms of input, not achievement. The quality of education in a district is related not to the learning accomplishment of its students, but to the per pupil expenditure or to the teacher-student ratio. Decisions are made on the basis of cost, not outcome. Teaching excellence is measured in terms of credentials and years, not performance. Students are judged to be more competent if they have had four years of French or physical education rather than three years. Students in this environment are forced to think in terms of consuming rather than producing. They prepare for preparing.

The alternative school assumes that learners are people who render a service to themselves, their schools, and their community. This assumption demands examination and revision of the roots of curricula, of roles, and of regulations. One concern it suggests is that to fill empty tanks of needy learners is not enough. Learners must attend to each other's wants and the wants of a larger community. Learning is not only individualized, it is also "groupized" so that learners transcend self. And the benefit provided is not only some future promise; it is also for now. The alternative school will explore new educational practices that would assess and address individual and group needs and aspirations for both the present and the future.

An alternative school will thrive on diversity. In systems language,

schools are open systems; that is, they exchange something—people, information—with other systems and within their own subsystems. One of the characteristics of such an open system is equifinality or the presentation of multiple means to serve the same end. Equifinality, like other open system characteristics, fights against the inevitability of entropy. Many schools and school "systems" have failed to maintain the characteristic of equifinality—they have become closed and unequivocal. A school or a classroom or a teacher in such a state anticipates only one way or one set of acceptable experiences or behaviors.

The alternative school is established to promote options. It is another means within the system to serve the end of education. It is characterized by providing many means to reach its objectives. In addition, it is characterized by an exchange of information and people within its own subsystem and with other systems (schools) that surround it.

The alternative school will thus endeavor to eliminate the boundaries that traditionally tend to develop—boundaries between schools, between teachers and students, between administrators and teachers, between parents and school, between subjects, between training and experience, between time schedules, between classrooms. One of the strengths of the integrated day school, and, incidentally, the one-room school house (a possible alternative) is its ability to integrate a wide variety of interests. There seem to be multiple sounding boards for multiple stimuli as opposed to the single sounding board for twenty-five students provided by the lesson-planned, forty-five minute, teacher-dominated, single-purpose, passively pupilled, pedestrian classroom experience. The alternative school, borrowing from Drucker, can be "the missing link between having a number of disconnected elements, each marginally effective, and an integrated system of great power."

Management

An alternative school will provide for planned renewal. It will establish an external relationship with the other schools in the school system so that it can be used as a clinical laboratory to study and experience teaching and learning styles and environments.

Alternative schools will structure new ways of allocating resources. Project budgeting, multiple salaries, differing distributions of structures, personnel, and the tools of learning will reflect various ways of appropriating and spending school finances. The school will operate on equivalent total per pupil expenditures for the district but will

experiment with new ways to redistribute that money.

Experimental efforts are often limited by real political, social, and economic constraints in an existing situation. It is difficult to test viability of student-directed learning, for instance, in a system that is constantly exerting the subtle influences of mandatory attendance for a set number of hours per day; required courses and standardized exams; school rules, regulations, and prerequisites; and community pressures for college admission, strict discipline, homework, and teacher stereotyping. Alternative schools will be formed to try out some of the classic as well as the brand-new theories of education that, because of the exigencies of practicable schooling, are usually left orphaned on the schoolhouse steps.

There will be a direct tie between the alternative school, other schools in and outside of the district, the university, and other research-based agencies. Student and staff exchange between these institutions will facilitate the direct application of theoretical work and will also greatly influence the direction of curriculum study and inservice teacher education.

An alternative school will provide a new system of governance. As a part of this economic and political reconfiguration, different designs of decision making and control will be created. Approaches other than state legislature to school board to superintendent to superintendent's staff to principal to department head to teacher to student will be experimentally attempted within the framework of the public school system. To provide a renewing influence on the school district, the alternative school must not only have an innovative climate and structure internally, but must have an external appearance that symbolically and actually demonstrates freedom (in terms of less bureaucratic control and fewer accomodations) and change (in terms of experimentation and risk).

The alternative school will provide internal mechanisms that allow students to initiate their own courses of study. In addition, a broad base of community participation and membership, in cooperation with the students and staff, will determine the direction of the school. To accomplish this, governance councils of parents, staff, and students will deal directly with the board of education or the superintendent instead of using the usual chain of command. This will require careful and specific understanding by all parties from the very start of the planning effort.

Many attempts to change existing practices have been accompanied by moral demands for participatory management. Involvement, however, cannot be tokenism. Commitment, not endorsement, should be the focus of group leadership. The motive for group effort should

be the identification, prioritizing, and solving of problems, not the acceptance of someone else's predesigned solution.

An alternative school will be distinguished by choice. Many of the foregoing conditions can be possible only in a school that has been freely chosen by students, parents, and teachers. In order to remain an alternative, the school can be required of no one. Mechanisms can be designed that ensure wide representation of age groups, community groups, and ethnic groups in the school population. The alternative school will be a cross-section of the school district enrollment; its membership will come from all geographical and socioeconomic areas.

Choice is the essence of the alternative school as a change strategy. Consensus in the school district is not required before a change is made, as long as the right is retained for one school to do one thing and an alternative school to do another. This permits daring while ensuring limited risk. Through the voluntary participation of its constituency, the school district will avoid an endemic danger—the slaughter of new ideas by the institutional demand that they can only succeed if they are acceptable to everyone.

The alternative school concept takes a position halfway between evolutionary growth and revolutionary overthrow. Although our lives strive for choice—in religion, politics, and enterprise—citizens have little choice regarding *public* education. In a past era requiring limited and specialized schooling, there was little need for choice. But as Margaret Mead writes, ". . . the whole teaching and learning continuum, which was once tied in an orderly and productive way to the passing of generations and the growth of the child into a man—this whole process has exploded in our faces." In the contemporary era of great mobility, knowledge explosion, sophisticated out-of-school learning experiences, branching interests and specialties, cosmopolitan values, and an ambiguous future, choice is needed, and the need is acute!

Alternative schools are one alternative in the continuing search for a more responsive and equitable process of education. To create a true alternative, a collective and bold effort is needed on the part of parents, administrators, teacher organizations, state departments, schools of education, and students. Each must relinquish a part of its patiently built and preciously guarded territory in the public education sector to explore cooperatively new experimental dimensions in the enterprise of schooling.

The opinion is growing within education and outside it that those groups who feel a sincere and responsible compulsion to be truly innovative should be given an opportunity to act. Alternative schools

can be a new era in innovation for those who really dare to share. Looking ahead, we can see each school district with several alternative schools, their size varying according to the community population. These schools would be both concept and place, for as a specific alternative becomes established and accepted or rejected by the system, a new alternative will grow, and it in turn will eventually be replaced. The alternative school will be an option for change and a process for improvement. It will always be in the process of creation and re-creation—pruning and growing new roots for a stronger and more adaptable system—building for the future.

The substantial risk and investment involved may result in some losses for the schools and the systems that support them; they may also result in profits gained by the revitalization of many who will help shape the future of our society. Alternative schools offer no less and promise no more than that choice—choice indeed worthy of our efforts.

4

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE: A COMMUNITY BEGINS TO LEARN

For the first time in my years of teaching in Pasadena, I hate to go to school because I don't want to see what is happening to students.—an administrator

So far it doesn't mean much to me. Nothing has really happened and there isn't much time for anything to happen.—a student

She complains of things to do.—a parent

It is too good an idea to drop. Public schools jolly well better offer a different viable education.—a board member

It is my judgment that the first step must be not the contrivance of an illusion of their involvement, but the seeding of real motivation, of internalized goals. However long that takes, real learning is contingent upon it.—a teacher

The alternative school means better education to me because we can learn what we want instead of going from class to class and having to do this and that.—a student

It takes a while to be free.—a student

On the Canvas

That the planning school actually became a reality was both a surprise and the result of extreme diligence by a large number of individuals. That the planning school *survived* the first year was a shock and probably the result of direct assistance from Heaven! The planning

school had significant problems all mired in an enervating environment of misdirection and personal conflict and thereby blown out of proportion. The resultant mythology about the alternative school became one of its biggest problems.

Star News headlines announced on February 16, "Planning School Off to Enthusiastic Start." On May 21 they asked, "Alternative School Hassle: Why the Fuss?" The "hassle" that developed during four months was interpersonal in nature. Its history began inchoately with a power struggle between the Pasadena Unified School District administration and the University of Massachusetts. The parties were symbolic of the mythological struggle between the ordained and the disdained, the teacher and the learner, and the struggle was symbolically maintained by an unworkable school codirectorship designed to represent and ensure this dual (and unfortunately incompatible) interest. The struggle dominated the thoughts of directors, teachers, interns, students, and parents. Mistrust, closed attitudes, and private, uncoordinated activity characterized the working conditions and the prevailing communication or lack thereof. In one instance, for example, a community meeting in Pasadena to discuss the alternative school was arranged by visiting staff of the university, but school district administrators were neither informed nor invited until a few hours before the meeting was scheduled. This clandestine climate resulted in staff dissension, public rumor, unprofessional conduct, lack of commitment, and a pervasive and paralyzing fear. One parent was moved to recommend that for the future the school should "remove all sense of impending doom."

Insecure in their own efforts to change, individuals and cliques sought strength and unity through criticisms and distrust of their adversaries. The results were less than satisfying, because permanent opponents could seldom be recognized. Scapegoats, however, were everywhere. One of them was an exciting young educational innovator named Ramon Cortines.

Back in 1971, Cortines was the assistant superintendent for secondary education in Pasadena. He was also recognized as the educational idea man, the innovator for the system. We first met when I picked Ray up at Bradley Airport in Hartford for a conference at Mt. Snow in Vermont. During the drive, Ray inquired about my family and my background. He talked enthusiastically about the green Vermont countryside and its old houses. At the conference he listened as a polite visitor. When pressed, he spoke enthusiastically about the many alternative programs in Pasadena. He never spoke about himself. He was extremely personable but guarded and apart from the group. He was eventually placed in a position of ultimate authority over the

new school by the board of education. Ray Cortines was to become an unpredictable fulcrum in the survival fight of the Pasadena Alternative School.

Since I was to become the university codirector of the Pasadena Alternative School, Ray and I were destined to become professional antagonists. We also became very close friends. When we moved to Pasadena in January, 1972, my wife and my two children were welcomed by Ray as though we were his own family. After a typical five-day week of uncompromising and sometimes bitter in-fighting, the five of us often spent the weekend together in seclusion.

Ray Cortines' home in Pasadena, the prize-winning Hillmont, is furnished with chandeliers, original paintings, and stained glass windows. His gardens are in exquisite bloom twelve months a year. He has many outside interests including working with several colleges and sponsoring a camp for mentally retarded children. He owns a house at the beach and a ranch in the Sierras. On weekends he drives his Rolls Royce through town wearing a tennis shirt and blue jeans. Ray is a complicated man, a Pasadena man, a man for all seasons. While our public lives were spent in sincere combat because of the very missions of the alternative school and the university, our private lives were spent in equally sincere argument and education about the politics and the promises of public schooling.

A few weeks before the board of education was scheduled to vote on whether or not the Pasadena Planning School should be continued, Ray Cortines, the assistant superintendent in charge of the program, suddenly dismissed five university undergraduate interns who were permanent staff members of the alternative school. A second and equally deleterious act (from the standpoint of the image of the school) was his strong and lengthy recommendation in a public board meeting *against* continuation of the school. Obviously, his views were highly regarded since he was appointed superintendent two months later. He was also the person first responsible for pursuing the idea of the alternative school in Pasadena. Figuratively, it was his baby, and he was a respected father.

Another damaging blow came a week later when my codirector of the alternative school, another respected, innovative administrator assigned by the district to the project, strongly criticized the school in a public board meeting. Thus, the two Pasadena administrators chosen by the board of education to guide and direct the alternative school indicted the school and recommended against it continuing!

At a second session of the board meeting, approximately fifteen parents according to a planned schedule spoke about their favorable impressions. Each adult addressed a different aspect of the school

program. One parent read a statement from the parents of the alternative school unanimously recommending continuation. Apparently in response to these testimonials, the board voted to continue the school with university personnel and help in 1972–73.

A Fight for Survival

The behind-the-scenes creation of a strong school community, which culminated in this united, highly moving, and influential appeal to the board is worth review.

The first step of this process was community *involvement.* From the very first, the school became a community concern. Hundreds of individuals from every school, every segment of the city, and every community group attended meetings, discussions, and socials to hear about the alternative school concept and to offer their opinions. Clearly, no plan had been finalized behind university or downtown walls. The community was helping (though they were suspicious of this open-ended approach) to develop the plan. Several published reports further stimulated community interest. The board had several open meetings where hundreds of citizens discussed the alternative school idea. As part of the student selection process, parents and staff met—a triad of each student, his or her parents, and teachers—to discuss the school briefly. It was stressed in these meetings that parents were invited to deselect themselves and their child if they did not wish to play an active part in the school. By "playing a part" was meant their contribution of time during the school day, their service on committees, or their attendance at meetings. Thus, there was a verbal commitment from each parent to become involved.

The next step was to convert that promise into actual *participation.* After two weeks of chaotic operation, the staff felt it was no longer possible to keep the parents from viewing the damage. With trepidation, an evening meeting was set up, and parents of about 90 percent of the students came. Three unforeseen parent responses at that meeting may well have affected the direction and tone of the school for the remainder of the year.

First, a statement was made by a staff member explaining the school circumstances. It was noted that slow progress was being made in many areas, but it was also noted that the school was woefully short of many essential supplies. The next morning as students came to school, parents also came, bearing gifts. That morning the school received two movie projectors, two file cabinets, sets of shelves, baskets of books, play equipment, science equipment, and much more.

The day vividly proved that parents were a powerful resource for improving education. Their contributions and their rallying force continued through the final day of the school year.

The second occurrence of that meeting came from a decision to break into small groups and exchange information and opinions about the school. Dispelling staff apprehensions, the parents showed they were willing supporters of the school—tolerant, understanding, and eager to be of help. This verbal backing gave everyone new and sustained confidence. Parents were thus viewed not only as resources, but as part of the team.

The third thing that happened in that meeting was even more remarkable and influential. The staff, in an effort to create a managerial policy-making or -advising group, suggested a representative council of parents, teachers, students, and others. Soon parents rose to express their unwillingness to be represented by anyone and voted instead to meet regularly in town meetings. This decision was discouraging to the staff in that it seemed to indicate an element of parental distrust of the staff and of each other. It also suggested a cumbersome and wasteful decision-making process. In reality, it was the best thing that ever happened!

From that evening on, parents met every Wednesday night at the school. These meetings were always well attended—50 percent of the parents or better—and the school very quickly became a family effort. Soon parents trickled in during the day, apparently not satisfied with the taste they received weekly. Students, on the other hand, became jealous of the evening meetings and soon started showing up on Wednesday nights. Occasionally, parents called special meetings at their homes, and, again, the attendance was extraordinary. As the weeks went on, the school became a community of adults and children meeting day and evening.

Parents formed themselves into task forces, each designed to meet a special school problem. An information group worked on internal communications and external public appearances. A resource committee gathered needed equipment and supplies. A transportation committee enabled the school to utilize community resources. A planning group listed all the items the planning school had to consider and target dates for decisions. From this latter effort grew four or five additional committees, each reviewing different aspects of the alternative school design.

Thus, parents had actually moved into the governance of the school, deciding on matters of administration, curriculum, public relations, student selection, and so forth. Sharing this governance to a great extent were students, but the mechanism was not as clearly developed.

It was difficult to accommodate the interests of both primary and secondary students. Several individual students, however, rose to the surface as very influential members in determining school policy. On one of the first days of school, a young girl stood in the school town meeting and adamantly announced, "I don't like being separated and I don't like being called a little kid!" Though the problem of relating and scheduling different ages persisted, it was treated with greater sensitivity after that statement.

Governance, though, was not the major vehicle for student decision making. The day-to-day choices students had to make, starting with whether or not to come to school that day, provided unlimited opportunity—and problems. Nothing was required, and at times during the day nothing was even offered. Students really had the task of charting each day, often without the help of navigators, materials, maps, schedules, or warning buoys. Last-minute changes, cancellations, and emergencies were routine. Routine was unroutine.

Students eventually resorted to their own imagination. One group established a post office, another group ran a school store, another set up a science exhibit complete with twenty-five cents admission charge, another organized a clean-up committee, and the girl who resented being called a little kid joined with another girl and set up a booth offering private advice and guidance.

But the casual and not-so-casual observer seeing students chasing each other through classrooms, uncompleted projects left here and there, a great deal of playing outside, games of Scrabble and cards, and endless slouching around on couches and chairs reading magazines, paperbacks, and comics—whenever there was a lag in the conversation—could sum up the general school activity in two words, "wasting time." And in the world of school, wasting time is Public Enemy Number One. Time is to schooling as fidelity is to marriage. Cutting five minutes from a French class for an assembly is committing major surgery. Students coming to school five minutes late are usually sent to the penal colony. Students who write notes during study hall commit sin. There shall be one hundred eighty days of school. Thou shalt come and go with the bell. Five days times forty-two minutes times thirty-six weeks equals English III. "Dick, you were in the boys' room *too long*!" "Jane, spend *more time* on your homework."

To invite parents and students to participate in the decision-making processes also invites a redefinition of "wasting time." Giving people the opportunity to make decisions (as contrasted with merely choosing from several options) must also imply their having the choices *not* to make a decision, to do *nothing*, or to do something *wrong*. The democratic process may not be a fast or smooth decision-making system

compared to autocracy. If we seriously believe in democracy and self-determination, though, it seems that schools should put those ideals to practice despite their comparative inefficiency. Anyone who has fought through the frustration of a group defining its own limits, negotiating its own resources, and attempting to identify and satisfy its own needs has "wasted" much time but has experienced the amazing creation of interdependence, trust, and warmth—has been part of the birth of a community of learners. The birth process, characterized by town meeting and curricular decisions, was necessarily accompanied by the labor pains of "wasting time."

The third phase of the uniting and democratizing process, *incorporation*, was thus taking place. Distinctions between administrator, student, teacher, parent, older, younger, leader, listener were being erased. There were no longer parent problems, student problems, staff problems, administration problems; they were all school problems and were shouldered by everyone.

With the realization that problems were a shared responsibility came the corollary that all individuals could help to solve problems. That is, the group itself, however defined, in whatever situation, was recognized as the primary resource for learning. Learning came from an outside force only when members of the group privately or collectively negotiated for it.

Teachers and students are kind of equal. You can use first names.—a student

It's fun. If you want to have a club, you can organize your own.—a student

I like to be able to do things by myself, not have teachers tell you what to do.—a student

There is social learning here—people discuss personal problems and they learn from each other.—a student

You can talk to the teachers the way you talk to your friends.—a student

I can learn what I want to learn—like typing on my own.—a student

It gives you a chance to express yourself, to be free, to bring out talents that you never knew you had.—a student

A lot of people are settling down and figuring out what they want to do, not just heading for some goal set by someone else.—a student

You can speak up about what you feel—it's not just teachers teaching. Little kids give older kids broader experience. You know everybody in school. It's one big family.—a student

Thus, in its collaborative search for new resources for learning, the alternative school became a corporation—one big family. Adopting new titles such as calling a teacher or an administrator a "facilitator" is not the point. The point is that there are not teachers, for everyone is a teacher. Everyone is a facilitator—some get paid more than others, and some work longer than others.

The student playing Scrabble is actually helping her opponent increase her vocabulary and learn to relate better. The couch sitters are talking about their personal problems, their family problems, and their school problems, and the group is giving its response. Occasionally, they discuss what they are reading. They are also touching each other, leaning on each other, arguing with each other, learning to tolerate, to show emotion, to disagree, to empathize, and to love.

The boy under the tree with his nose in a book goes home and for the first time discusses his reading with his father—who then begins to read the same books himself.

The teacher entered in the paper airplane contest is humorously disqualified for cheating.

The youngster who rips off jewelry, money, combs, records is making a pair of sandals and a large mural—the first things he has created in school in two years—and is a proud member of his mother's sewing class.

The talented high school girl who spends a full day each week at the art museum is now teaching ceramics to a group of youngsters.

The mother of the precocious child suddenly finds herself entirely devoted to a black high schooler. The boy knows two curricula—his and whitey's—and now he sits each day with a white middle class mother occasionally holding her young white daughter on his lap discussing his family, his future, and his most private thoughts.

A mother brings in a homemade potter's wheel, and an ex-student of a teacher comes in to instruct students in pottery. The teacher's wife comes in weekly to teach silversmithing. Another teacher's girlfriend teaches macramé.

A graduate student from a nearby college spends a morning each week instructing in art. Three undergraduates present experiments in physics and chemistry. Another undergraduate spends four days each week with the youngest children.

In addition to the mother who teaches sewing class at home, one grandmother delivers a class on geology. A parent who is a doctor talks about the systems of the body. A mother who works in an emergency ward talks about treatment for drugs. A public relations director at Sears Roebuck talks about his job.

Groups of students are always gone—to a museum, the junkyard,

the motor pool, the mountains, the library, the courthouse, the police station, the beach, the pet clinic, the park, another school.

And so it goes. This and much more for only fifty students in less than five months, students, teachers, parents always searching for new resources, new ways to answer the insatiable energy and curiosity of the enrollment.

Different movies are brought into the school every day and are avidly watched by a half-dozen students.

A parent brings in four typewriters, two calculators, an adding machine, and one Flexowriter donated by Burroughs for use by the students.

A high school student brings in an old car, which is quickly dissected and consumed by the auto class.

A mother is surrounded with a mixed-age group of students lying on their backs on towels. They speak two mornings a week of yoga, philosophy, and wisdom.

The undergraduate members of the staff are everywhere. One is sitting outside with a group of primary children reading *The Cat in the Hat.* Another sits with a single student tutoring him in algebra. Another is out gathering a carload of scrap leather for her leather class. Another supervises a basketball game. Another directs one act of *The Crucible,* a presentation that will culminate her class on witchcraft.

One student spends the majority of his time writing a book on teacher evaluation, another befriends younger students who need help.

The school has broadened its horizons. It is a community.

> In few situations is a parent so motivated or permitted to spend hours and days with one child of another parent, listening, talking, tutoring, guiding. The effects, personal and academic, of such concentrated education are incomparable.—a teacher

Perhaps the most obvious achievement in the Pasadena Alternative School was the building of relationships. Parents stated the major strengths were respect for individuals—students, parents, faculty—the right to differ, and the feeling of community.

One parent called the attitudes of the community "fantastic." One student said the major strength of the school was "parent participation—especially when we had problems."

> Everybody is working together. Nobody is worried about age. There are no conflicts—people are learning together.—a student
>
> You can be more informal with teachers. You can talk to them

the way you talk to your friends.—a student

My God, this is the first PTA meeting my son and I have ever attended together!—a parent

One high school student organized a drill team of elementary students who were not in the alternative school. She used the school every afternoon for practices. These girls, all black, worked on dances and other routines, and they performed for the school. Often during their practice breaks the girls arranged themselves in rows and "played school." Through the alternative school student leader they "rehearsed" the "hidden curriculum" of their schools—how to behave, how to distract, how to speak properly, how to teach. The influence of the alternative school seeped out.

Student visitors came into the school all day long—to check it out or to stay awhile. After school hours, neighborhood youngsters came to breathe the school's freedom or to chat with the ever-present staff members. They had not known previously school as a place where they could find adult friends and peace. When custodial service was terminated during the year because of budget cuts, the drill team—a group of "outsiders"—volunteered to clean up the school each evening.

A visitor dropped into school one day just to comment that she had picked up a group of youngsters in her car the other day and she knew immediately that they were from the alternative school. She knew, she said, because "your students are the only students in the city who walk in groups of young and old, and black and white without the slightest hint of tension. Your children are so natural," she said.

The alternative school was a family. Before school and after, during recess and lunch, throughout all class activities, groups were diversified. They did not break up into little kids and big kids, or poor kids and rich kids, or kids and adults, or blacks and whites. On the final day of school, everyone went to the beach for the day. They took turns throwing each other in the water and burying each other in the sand. The black high schooler, who knew resistance and hatred and arrogance, was the catalyst of the group. He spent the entire day going from one student to another joking, wrestling, talking, playing pranks. His "victims" were white and black, female and male, young and old, shy and outgoing. His broad white smile set the mood for the day. He was everyone's friend, always giving, giving. A woman sitting with her friends came over and asked as the group was packing up, "What is this?" When she was told that it was a school, she remarked, "I have been watching you all day and I just can't believe what I see. It's really remarkable, you're just one big family!"

In a relatively short time—four months—an assortment of diverse individuals became a group, a democratic community in which every individual was equal, all shared responsibility and leadership, everyone helped and learned from each other. It was no surprise and no coincidence that when the chips were down the teachers, students, and parents presented a strong defense. The school was theirs. Their motive for acting at the board meeting was not do-gooding or altruism, it was self-preservation. Whatever it was that the dissenting administrators had lost, the new community had apparently gained, and they were not going to give it up easily.

5

THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL: CYGNET OR UGLY DUCKLING?

There ought to be continual experimentation, different and even radical education.—a Pasadena board member

I don't believe the district should continue to use children for experiments.—a Pasadena administrator

Idealistically, I feel schools must offer more than they do now, and I don't mind offering my child as a guinea pig. Realistically, she was bored to death by school, and if we didn't make some change, we were going to lose her interest in school completely.—a Pasadena parent

The Movement

The alternative school movement continues to grow in cosmic dimensions. Every day new schools, new periodicals, new programs, new conferences crop up. And as they appear, the difference between alternative school creators steadily widens. Leading the alternative school band are the prophets, the profiteers, the profitless, and the professors.

So far, the band has made more noise than music, though at times exquisite harmony has broken through the rhetorical cacaphony and classroom chaos. It is the harmony of young and old voices that reveals and lifts the human spirit and gives us fleeting hope for the future. But in the total effort, these joyous moments are too rare and

often too spontaneous to give us any lasting sense of reinforcement, accomplishment, or direction.

As they grow in popularity, alternative schools are also losing any common element they may once have had except, perhaps, their being part of a cause. There are the private schools and free schools with many sizes and shapes. There are schools at the early childhood level and at the community college or university level. Then there are the open classrooms, the lab schools, the schools without walls, the street academies, the store fronts, and the college preparatory schools for dropouts and pushouts. A multitude of theories about "alternative" systems abound, from deschooling to spaceship earth to the voucher plan. There are the single ethnic group "house" and the opportunity or continuation school for "intolerables." There are the very popular school-within-a-school and the evening school. There are the do-it-cheaper school, the parents-who-want-to-do-it-themselves school, and close to that the parent-condemnation-of-everything-that-exists school. There is the school for the disenfranchised. There is the impact or change lever school. Then there is a group of local educator brands, which create greater semantic difficulty. These include the let's-have-another-alternative school, the let's-get-on-the-bandwagon school, the let's-get-on-the-map school and, finally, the let's-find-another-way-to-do-the-same-thing school.

Thus, the "movement" is a very muddied water. To qualify for membership in the alternative school club, potential candidates use the word "traditional" at least six times a day as though the word were synonymous with "stupid" and as though it were an absolute—universally understood and universally condemned (except by the stupid people). The password used to enter meetings is "alternatives," a puffed-up nonword that emenates from educational walls, literature, and lecterns like socially acceptable graffiti.

The point is that labeling a school "alternative" no more defines its purpose than calling a program "humanistic" defines the content. Those who become sincerely involved are likely to find that what started as a genuinely united effort—developing the alternative school—ends with a very mixed bag of agendas. In no way can the constituents, not to mention the critics, be totally satisfied. The fact is that they were not talking the same language in the first place.

> I am enjoying in real life an educator's dream.—an administrator
>
> I am wary of those who come with a full commitment for educational change.—an administrator
>
> It is a school of total freedom, where, when, and if you learn anything, it is your achievement because to learn anything in

this school you have to get up and get into a group and listen all by yourself. There is no system that is set up for you like in regular school.

It is a school where you either start working your mind for yourself or sit and say, "This school is boring." I like this school. It is here to try to teach people in a free relaxed society rather than the tense uncomfortable regular school where words go in one ear and out the other.—a student

Concentrate less on what she "needs" to know to function as an interchangeable cog in society and concentrate more on developing and fulfilling her as an individual . . . as herself.—a parent

I'm just sorry that every child in the Pasadena Unified School District missed this experience.—a parent

Despite its association with a confusion of indiscriminate grouping of courses and purposes, the alternative school is one hope, perhaps the last hope, of providing all young people with a reasonable education. That is not because the alternative school provides all students with superior learning, but because the alternative school concept stands as a symbolic challenge for all schools—public and private—to meet the needs of all individuals.

Alternative implies choice. Alternative schools provide a choice of schooling. There are many options within that alternative, but you must first start with the assumption that there can really be a *choice* if you are to begin talking about the alternative school.

Many educators proudly display a flea market of school goodies: a little team teaching, some scheduling departures, a teacher aide here, a new science curriculum there, a student representative at board meetings, a class that meets at night, a new open-space school, or even an alternative school for the nerds. "If you're looking for alternatives, we've got 'em!" they boast. Well, the innovative features may be *alterations*, but they are not an alternative. And even as alteration, they are usually seen as such by the administrator; the student is channeled into one situation or another with very little say or even opinion.

Creating An Alternative

Let's look at it another way. Suppose school is the thing to which we wish to create an alternative. What is school? It most certainly is a building, usually constructed with bricks. It often has two-inch tubular steel playground equipment. On the inside it is tiled and

linoleumed and painted faded yellow or wet cement gray. It has a principal and it has teachers. It has desks, bells, teachers' lounges. It has English, social studies, French, shop, physical education, and guidance. It is usually large and bureaucratic. It has requirements, rules, and audiovisual rooms. It has teacher salaries and it has grades (both kinds).

Now let's create an alternative school. What would another kind of school look like, be like? We would not necessarily do away with everything; we just recognize what we have and then imagine a possible alternative. One option might be presented by comparing the environment of school classrooms and halls to that of a church or a living room. And so, brick by brick, or cedar shake by cedar shake, or day lily by cowslip, we begin to build the alternative school. Determining the "we" is part of the preliminary investigation. Finally, to stamp the new creation as the alternative, the public is invited to make a choice as to its affiliation.

> I like it better than other schools. I like coming. Before, I didn't want to come to school. I don't like it when people have to boss me around.—a student
>
> The eyes of all Pasadena are upon us. No one knows exactly what is happening in the school—not even always the staff and students themselves—and yet a tremendous amount of hope and faith has been generated by the experiment. This is the most positive, exciting result of the alternative school's existence so far. We parents are enthusiastic, the staff is enthusiastic, and 1,200 other curious parents have sent in applications on the sniff of a promise.—a parent
>
> The alternative school can offer the needed processes in which each user of public schools can make a decision concerning the types of education which make the most sense for him by giving parents, students, teachers, and administrators a direct voice in educational decision making.—an administrator
>
> We like the school because the leaders and most of the parents, we feel, are truly interested in the future of all children, regardless of race. We are a minority race and, of course, this is very important to us. We want our children to become useful citizens, and feel that they will be involved with this school.—a parent

The process of building a school, however, really separates the graffiti boys from the construction workers. Practitioners involved in educational change often find that the great issues and angry slogans that have such powerful symbolic force and staying power at the

training camp simply don't translate very well into what actually happens on the battlefield. The realization grows that the "antagonists" are really humans who like themselves are well-meaning, well-trained, dedicated, and deserving. Because of the recognition that many existing programs have already proven their excellence, because of creeping doubt about revolutionary intents and strategies, because of the enormous gap between dreams and real progress, and because of the ever-present and tiring force of mediocrity—"the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes"—the insecurity of the builder grows.

Those interested in developing the school would be wise to hassle out some basic issues before the cruise begins, if they want to avoid the crisis of deciding who can stay in the overloaded life raft after the ship is torpedoed. The first question is, "What are we trying to accomplish?" As suggested previously, this question can become a most ambiguous and annoying nag.

I feel the alternative school can have a healthy impact on educational change in our district.—a board member

It is ill conceived and ill planned.—a board member

The school is not meeting the needs of children.—an administrator

Learning took place both within the school walls and without. The student received a fresh idea of what a teacher should be and most importantly could be.—an intern

The tremendous growth leaves me with a sense of wonder.—a parent

Yes (there is learning). . . . Anything you want to learn, all you have to do is ask for it.—a student

We have been accused of not receiving inservice training, but considering the experimental stages of the school, no typical inservice training could be applicable to our situation. The best inservice training was not only in the classroom, but at the numerous meetings where we all helped each other plow through.—an intern

The pressure at this school would not be as the pressure of the public schools where the kid doesn't get the chance to bring out any motivation because most everything is done for him. There the teacher tells him what to do and he does it regardless of its value to learning. In this school the kid will be the judge about what books and materials will be useful to his learning, with some exception. . . . Self-motivation comes from within and the atmosphere and classes will try to be ones that will *bring it out* and *develop* it.—a student

Had we preset ideas of how to teach in this school, the entire philosophy of an alternative school would have been destroyed—students developing their own school.—an intern

I would like the rest of the year to be a gigantic exploration.—a parent

More attention to basic subject matter—especially math.—a parent

It would be a school with much less pressure. The basics would be available but not forced on.—a student

I need less playing around and more work, and *I don't want any more contracts!* If I hear that word, I will scream.—a student

Not everyone needs to share the same reason to be a part of the alternative school, but certainly conflicting aims had best be minimized. The training camp slogans—Change, Freedom, Self-Identity, Enjoyment, Autonomy, Individualization—are too fuzzy and too superficial to give any real support to a school board proposal, a staff planning session, a parent conference, or a bored child. Specific questions should be discussed about defining the alternative in terms of student age range, program intent, anticipated capabilities and incapabilities, school and student evaluation, and planned strategies to change schools and integrate (or segregate) the community.

Other questions might also be asked: What are the differences between educational alternatives, an alternative program, and the alternative school? What is freedom? structure? Do they have something to do with scheduling? organization? sequencing? testing? grade achievement? How will the daily schedule be determined? Will it be posted? What attitudes prevail about discipline? smoking? swearing? using first names? What is laziness? wasting time? How can students be used as teachers? How will students and teachers be organized and grouped?

In developing an argument favoring the establishment of an alternative school, specific details of the program must be thoroughly considered. And the semantics as well as the substance of this argument will be carefully weighed by potential supporters and potential critics.

The Language of Advocacy

Ask how the curriculum will be structured or unstructured to support what the school hopes to accomplish. Whether in colloquium or tea party, people discussing education usually come from one of two camps. They are the "children-first" camp and the "knowledge-first" camp. The stance taken by each camp is often less secure on its

own good merits than it is on the strength it derives from opposing the adversary position. Because of this basic insecurity and because of the magnetic pull toward polarization and away from moderation, the only maintenances of stability seems to come from keeping the enemy camp under constant threat of annihilation. Alternative schoolers should be prepared for this unfortunate war. It is a war fought between freedom and structure as if it can be assumed that those two undefined absolutes are incompatible and that no marriage is even remotely possible.

I've been disappointed and so has (my son) with the curriculum and what he has learned so far. He feels that the past few weeks have been mostly idle play. . . . He is interested in learning, not just attending school.—a parent

I find no general pattern or outline of principles to be studies. . . . Courses of study may be highly individualized but there should be some course outline worked out by the student and her teacher.—a parent

In regular school they'll say that you have to take math. Here you can take auto mechanics. But that is math to me.—a student

For some students the planning school has become a "do your own thing" situation. I have not seen anything that I consider innovative, and as it stands, the curriculum is not a sound educational program.—an administrator

Individual examples of profound personal change toward greater courtesy, tolerance, patience, warmth, group interaction, and yet frankness are sufficiently numerous and striking, in my opinion, to themselves justify an alternative school. They certainly don't stand alone as our successes, but do stand tall.—a teacher

It's kind of boring. A lot of the time there's not too much to do.—a student

I've learned more in these two months than in two years of my other school and that is the sincere truth. I've learned algebra, poetry, politics and in an interesting way. I've learned about leather, clay, jewelry, photography, witchcraft, Black Panthers, typing, and little kids.

Most of all I've learned about people and myself and a little bit about how our minds work. I've learned that I learn more when I'm given freedom—more than when I'm imprisoned in school. I like the alternative school and I'm for the way we are trying to revolutionize the old system of learning, which I hate.—a student

This school has saved her learning life by turning her to her

accomplishments, not her failures.—a parent

The seductive either-or trap of advocacy is a most debilitating, most unnecessary evil. It does create an eager following of cause mongers. But it is people with understanding of learning processes, who are appreciative of citizenry demands, who are *sensitive to those under* attack, who are knowledgeable about school costs and the tax structure, and who have an interest in children first rather than in power and overthrow; it is these people who will best serve in an effort to improve the public school system. Learning such things as survival skills, wisdom from the past, self-reliance, responsibility to groups, citizenship, decision making, study habits, self-esteem, cultural diversity, and the skills of interpersonal relations are positive goals of the alternative school. They also happen to be goals of most other schools. By talking about how goals will be achieved, not only about how existing schools are failing, advocates will encourage support and lend substance to a proposed program.

Words such as structure, rules, requirements, basic skills, and evaluation are not to be avoided as though they were contaminated. Rather, they can be emphasized within a context of new meaning and new balance. No group can achieve freedom without responsibility; no individual can achieve competence without skills; no program can achieve understanding without evaluation; no school can achieve education without an educational structure. Alternative school advocates must remember, even in the flames of critical attack, that they are not so much anti-school as they are pro-learning.

This is the nature, the mission, and the dilemma of the alternative school. For those who are involved, it can be a perplexing, wondrous, hazardous journey. The alternative school is something different for everyone—that is its attraction and its danger.

If it is to be an alternative, it has to be radically different, but being different is not sufficient description of what is to be accomplished. The difference must be defined and preferably defined in writing, for in the absence of written agreement, false assumption and unfulfilled expectations blossom.

Another major danger is the tendency to change the world and promise Utopia. If this is the school's original contract, it will also be its death sentence. The alternative school may be the vehicle for good education, but it must always be mindful that there will be other programs and teachers in the district that are better.

And for those who are considering or building the alternative school, the simple wisdom of a six-year-old student at the Pasadena Planning School comes back to haunt us: "Everybody be nice."

6

WHO SAYS?*

Much of the energy of the alternative school movement is devoted to finding financial backing, convincing school boards, soliciting community support, gaining sufficient autonomy for experimentation, and offering enjoyable and varied experiences for students. The question, "How much learning is going on?" is often lost in the shuffle. We are so busy with survival and maintenance concerns that we sometimes forget the purpose for its being and, in fact, that purpose—learning—becomes damnably bothersome. Oh, to be sure, the purpose is addressed rhetorically:

> . . . we want young people to learn more than grammar and geometry. We want them to learn in affective as well as cognitive areas. We want them to learn responsibility, self-direction, and self-esteem. We want them to learn how to relate to others and how to enjoy learning. We want them to learn how to learn. . . .

Beautiful words are written, but what do they mean and how are they realized? How do you reassure yourself and others that learning is actually taking place in the alternative school?

One question to ask is, "Is learning taking place in the regular school?" What makes schooling generally acceptable is the pretense that that is the case.

To many parents, (and kids and teachers and school board members),

*Much of this chapter appeared in *The Phi Delta Kappan* LIV, March, 1973, in an article entitled "Lions In The Park" by Philip DeTurk and Robert Mackin.

homework, teacher certification, and subject matter, bolstered by an evaluation system of testing and grading, give a powerful legitimacy and provide a security that "learning" prevails. The institutionalization of schooling with its polished and understandable norms "guarantees" that a service is being provided. Most importantly, from our standpoint, these same standards are also the grounds upon which alternative schools are usually and unfortunately judged.

Course offerings are better and are not limited to certain ages. . . . I could take more classes than at regular high school. I've become more self-sufficient. I know what I need and I fulfill it. I've accomplished more here than I did at (high school).—a student

(This school is) different from other schools—learning wise, like at regular school teachers tell you to sit down and be quiet and do certain pages. Here you can express your feelings to the teacher—if there is something you don't like about the teacher or the way the class is run, you can tell this to try to improve it. At regular school you would be sent to a counselor or the office for being sassy.—a student

I didn't want to take French or typing and now I feel I really like them. You don't have to write compositions of 500 words. They can be long or short. . . . (I have) learned much more than my friends have in regular school. They're doing the same old thing. It's not boring here. I've learned much more.—a student

An Alternative Setting and Meaning for Learning

One of the purposes of the four-month Pasadena Planning School was to ask questions about the very nature of learning. What does a child learn sitting on a couch with a book, visiting a pet clinic for a day, spending a morning in the art museum or an evening at a school meeting, playing a game of Scrabble, running a store, or helping a four-year old at lunch? The parameters of learning have changed.

I learned mostly about people and myself, not about subject matter.—a student

Chemistry with Cal Tech people.—a student

Didn't learn any times tables in my old school, but here they were so simple.—a student

I seemed to learn to divide better.—a student

Math, wood work.—a student

Drill team.—a student

Play—climbing things and trees.—a student

Plant gardens. Learned to like being with little kids.—a student

Learned about schools—different schools, learned how hard it is to start schools.—a student

I've gone to a leather class, learned about leather but didn't make anything but did learn something. I'm in a silver class and made a choker and I'm going to make a ring. I'm in a photography class and learned all about the camera and about developing film and stuff like that. I'm in yoga class and I learn about myself and love it. I'm in English and I'm reading a good book that I love and I learn about all that I do here in the alternative school. I'm in witchcraft but I haven't learned much yet because it hasn't gotten going yet. I'm in a project about the Black Panthers and I've learned that I don't like it. I've been on a lot of field trips like the animal hospital, tidal beach, the city attorney's office and some others, and today I'm starting a math class and last week I knitted a scarf.—a student

Learned how to cook—cooked for my dad when my mom was in the hospital.—a student

Math—I didn't think I was really no good but I had a chance.—a student

Auto mechanics.—a student

Slide rule.—a student

Made rings.—a student

I graduated from high school. Increased knowledge and interest in several subjects. Gained experience to pursue what I wanted to do.—a student

Read, read, read—about 10 books.—a student

The usual stuff but in an easier way.—a student

At the planning school, certain students made significant advances academically, socially, and otherwise. A couple learned to read and a few more learned to like to read. Several students completely changed their attitudes toward school. Some became visibly happier and much more adept at dealing with problems and other people.

I like being in this school because it's fun being with older and younger people. I like being able to do crazy things like putting chalk on my face to make me look like a monster. I do that a lot.—a student

I like to go to the school in the morning. I don't dread getting up. I really look forward to coming.—a student

It is obvious that it is impossible to fill all the needs of all the students. Perhaps some students (or parents) simply do not belong in the alternative school. The problem is we don't know which ones!

Clearly, we must recognize that different students have different priorities at different times. How do we begin to address these varied concerns within alternative schools?

Differences in backgrounds, self-concepts, socializing abilities, and the like, require different "success contexts." It becomes essential for alternative schools as a major demonstration of their worth to ask and reask themselves the fundamental question, "What is learning?" in order to create, in as personalized ways as possible, such contexts. We suggest further that in addressing this question, the school must view the way the student values himself and his needs, the way the student relates to other people, and the way the student operates within the institution of schooling. Within each of these dimensions lie variables that will affect what a student learns at a given place or time.

Setting Individual Learning Priorities

In the Pasadena Alternative School, David and Greg learned their math not because of expert math instructors, but because of special private trips to the park where they alone fought imaginary lions; because of their own Post Office where they operated a student information center; and because of hours spent at a parent farm and a parent cooking class where they planted, prepared, and ate not so imaginary food, and because school for the very first time was the very best place they could think of being. David and Greg, two nine year olds, one Jewish and one Black, learned their times tables because another student's mother devoted practically every day as a volunteer to bring them together, to make them happy, and to give them a sense of importance.

Students come into the alternative school just as they do in any school with different backgrounds—socially, academically, psychologically, and every other way. The alternative school really attempts to accommodate those differences. Each student must learn what the learning options are, which ones he is interested in, and how deeply he wants to learn within each option he chooses. Comments made by some Pasadena students in the spring of 1972 about their alternative school experience reveals this range of needs and interests:

I've been independent, have been able to do what I wanted

to do—like reading books, observing nature—that I never paid attention to before.

When I read, I read what I want to read about, like my pigeons, instead of reading out of an old regular school book with boring stories.

Never had any intentions to take photography and things like that before. They really turned me on.

As was the case with David and Greg, academic content is sometimes secondary to an environment that stresses and builds interpersonal relationships and self-confidence. The learner must learn how to be comfortable in order to be receptive to learning of any kind. He must learn how to learn.

To establish a school environment that allows students and staff to set differing learning priorities, we need to develop programs with several dimensions: making school acceptable and comfortable; defining new responsibilities for teachers; developing new responsibilities for students; recognizing additional sources of learning.

Making School An Acceptable Resource For Learning

One of the more subtle goals of the alternative school is to rebuild for the students a trust in the school as a place to learn and a belief that learning is a respectable and meaningful activity.

In a June survey at Pasadena, parents agreed that fostering a "joy of learning" was the greatest achievement of the alternative school. Students called it a "freedom to learn." One student cited her greatest achievement as: . . . loosening up to do work, overcoming my own resistance to work, getting interested in things and wanting to learn them.

This freedom to learn results from a redefinition of teaching. In the alternative school, the teacher transcends the traditional intellectual relationship with students.

One youngster remarked, "I learned to make friends with teachers, to know them as persons in their own life."

Another added, "Since the school is not forcing knowledge on students, they really want to learn."

The Teacher's New Responsibilities

An undergraduate intern in Pasadena wrote, "The students received a fresh idea of what a teacher should be and most importantly could

be." The teachers in the alternative school do consider a student's academic progress, but they also consider his or her interests and relationships with specific staff members and other students, home situation, and, of course, needs. The staff tries to provide an appropriate environment conducive to learning for the particular child. Teachers try to localize the problems so that they are not prescribing aspirin for a broken arm or math drill for a broken heart. In the case of Greg and David, the prescription called for lions in the park.

The Learner's Responsibilities

A student might spend 50 percent of his time on his own writing a book. Artistically inclined students might spend a day and a half each week in the art museum completely unsupervised. These were student-initiated learning experiences in the Pasadena Alternative School last year. One Pasadena student said, "I have learned to get along with all ages, and I have learned from little kids as much as I have learned from teachers." Another remarked, "I learned about cutting diameters in wood by teaching Blake who cut it wrong." A third student commented, "I learned to do for myself, because if I don't do for myself, nothing will get done."

Students, with the help of adults and other students, begin to learn that learning is something that they must control, not something that is done to them. Freedom to learn requires individual responsibility.

The Teacher Does Not Do All The Teaching

In our alternative schools, students and adults became part of a learning community—teaching and learning became a single act by a single person, or by a group!

The entire institution of schooling has been built around the role of the teacher as attorney, judge, and jury of learning. The presumption follows, therefore, that learning has a causal relationship to teaching. In the alternative school, however, learning can go on without teaching, and teaching can go on without teachers!

In the alternative schools we have worked with, everyone becomes "teacher"—the teacher's wife who comes in twice a week for jewelry class, the white mother who devotes her mornings to one black high school boy, the black high school boy who devotes his mornings to one white mother, the sheriff who holds a mock trial, the mothers who teach sewing and yoga, the intern, the three university students,

the secretary who teaches typing, the alternative school student who teaches what she has learned in the art museum about ceramics to other alternative school students, and the learning community who teach each other the meaning of respect and privacy and sharing and need.

Learning Becomes A Student Agenda

Bringing the student as well as the teacher into the evaluating role, and stretching the context of learning beyond the school walls, introduces some dramatic pedagogical questions:

—Why do we identify certain things as subjects?
—Why do we have requirements?
—Why are some subjects more important or "major"?
—What is curricular, and what is extracurricular?
—How do we define teacher?
—What is a school?
—What is learning?

The alternative school itself is learning some things about learning. There are many unanswered questions, and there is also a host of new questions to ask. Educators who look at the evaluation of learning in schools should keep the questions as well as the answers (grades or whatever) in mind. Are we asking these questions?

—Are students learning to learn?
—Are they preparing for future learning competence by building self-confidence, gaining an appreciation of group structures, using the school and other resources in a productive way?
—Is a student learning to overcome his special set of obstacles to effective learning?
—Is a student learning what there is to learn and which of those options he wants to take advantage of?

Learning in these terms requires a very broad alternative context, a context that allows each student to develop his potential.

Kim was an unusually quiet child when she entered the alternative school. She was twelve years old, black, pretty, and alone. She brought with her a history of academic difficulties. She spent weeks and then months in the alternative school reading comics, playing Scrabble, and just sitting. She was always in the background. Her thoughts

were deep inside and rarely expressed. Her mother was dismayed, the staff was perplexed. She completed almost no work, wrote nothing of consequence, seemed even to regress. Clearly the school had failed Kim. In four months, no noticeable learning had taken place.

Her mother did not give up. Twelve months after that very reticent beginning, Kim had changed. I watched her sit directly under the algebra teacher's nose, eagerly asking and answering questions. She had become mature, outgoing, competent, and extremely beautiful. When she learned that I was writing about the alternative school—her alternative school—she gave me this letter.

Before I came to the Pasadena Alternative School, I was a totally different person. I was not much of a participant in anything. I was also sort of quiet. Now, I'm not quiet, and I participate in too many things. I have learned so many things, things that I probably would never have known until I was much older. I take classes like photography, anthropology, psychology, physiology, and I also edit the school newspaper, just things that I would never have a chance to do. These things wouldn't be offered to an eighth grader at a public traditional school.

I like the fact that I could talk to my teacher, person to person, not student to teacher. Most teachers at the alternative school are young and open-minded, not traditional like the old, old teachers at public schools.

It seems to me that I am more mature than some of my friends my age that do not go to the alternative school. The reason may be because I have to discipline myself, decide whether I will go to my classes or goof off. At traditional schools they tell you what to do, when, and when not to do it. This responsibility, I think has been put upon myself. Also, I think since I am sometimes around high school students, I tend to act like them. Which may be mature, at times.

Not only have I learned the basic skills, but current events in the world. I now know, more about myself, and others. I'm eager to learn how. I used to *hate* math before I attended the alternative school. Now I feel better about myself in algebra, and sometimes ask my teacher to give me extra work, 'cause I enjoy it so. That's just algebra, I think I'm that way with almost all subjects now. One thing's for sure. When I reach the end of my adolescence and maybe, just maybe, have children, I would want them to be able to go to an alternative school just like me!

Does learning take place in the alternative school? The answer depends on who the individual under consideration is, what is meant by learning, and who is judging. If the alternative school has done nothing else, it has at least made us sensitive to the depth and scope of this essential educational concern.

7

PLANNING A SCHOOL

This chapter and the next are written for educators and others who are studying or implementing the alternative school concept. They are somewhat technical and detailed in nature. They are based on lessons learned from the Pasadena Alternative School (first called the Pasadena Planning School). The chapters will have less relevance and certainly less interest for readers who have little need to know about the content and strategies of planning.

Experience has shown that too many good ideas die because of over-planning. The factors causing this slow death are a knowledge gap between planners and others, changing objectives, the creation of outside fears and opposition strategies, loss of excitement and motivation, the burden of time on the planners, loss of timeliness, loss of key personnel. On the other hand, too little planning is certain to bring chaos and loss of financial support and credibility.

The Process of Change

One difficulty posed by the alternative school is that it advocates and even embodies educational change within a public school system. The difficulty is that the advocacy position tends to create a judgmental point of view. It is the alternative school people who tend to suggest they know what is best for everyone else. But this position is, of course, inconsistent with their principle of pluralism and their view of learning.

The prevalent view of the change process in education is revealed in the use of the term "change agent," a notion widely acclaimed in the current professional literature. The origins of this particular view seem to be in agriculture, but it is not obvious that agriculture and education are very analogous. Someday, education may develop the sophistication to grow new hybrid strains under controlled conditions, test their usefulness in terms of increase of quality, and then disseminate results to local schools with carefully defined plans for seeding, nurturing, and harvesting. But to borrow the "change agent" without having the research and development operation as a base seems a gross oversimplification of the entire change and organizing process, particularly when human interaction is concerned.

Change strategists of this ilk suggest solutions as though change were something you could pick up in your hands, pat lightly, and cook to a desired temperature—thus creating the language of "change agents," "resistance to change," "diffusion and dissemination," "testing and revision," "adoption," etc. All of those terms are object-oriented. In social endeavor, however, change is not something out there that you inject into something in here.

Members of the planning school in Pasadena found it almost impossible to use the suggestions of some university "change agents." And yet, this conventional relationship produces many school programs. Our sometimes fruitless contacts have shown the barren expanse between traditional planning "expert" and user. We have not learned how to make that relationship function well, but perhaps we are realizing the enormous extent to which it is dysfunctional, at least in terms of the alternative school. School people and universities may profit from what we have *not* learned. If consultants' help is to be used, joint determination, not university determination, of a schedule, a plan, a place, and a method for making consultant time beneficial is necessary. Occasional injections of "expertise" administered without careful diagnosis of existing problems can be either ineffective hallucination or damaging to the system.

The "change agent" and even the "organizational development" concepts can bring with them a mentality that assumes that school people need to be prodded, manipulated, powered, influenced, trained, convinced, duped, and generally tolerated by the cunning persuaders and purveyors of outside expertise. In short, the notion of a change agent as someone who comes into a school system to plan and implement innovation, just as a milkman might deliver milk, is an impossible role and a self-defeating job.

Admittedly, change is often created by the "movers" in a system. But they are usually well established and fairly secure in their positions.

If new, they are at least in control and can act essentially unchallenged. Outside interests who want to change the system, and this is often the case with the alternative school, should try to work with and for these established catalysts. The rule may be that there can be only one designated innovator per system. If the system has no innovator, it can possibly be moved by outside intervention. If it has a recognized mover, however, he or she had better be used or the effort will fail.

We must be wary not to repeat the very mistakes that we are trying to eradicate in public schooling. One of the most obvious errors we make in schooling is to force the student into a passive role.

> Traditional methods are dulling her imagination, limiting and often decreasing her knowledge and giving her an allergy to education in general.—a parent

We are striving in the alternative school to make the learner independent and self-sustaining.

> I expect his learning process to be augmented by daily opportunities to make decisions and experience the accompanying successes and frustrations.—a parent

Moreover, we are stressing that the teacher is not the source of learning nor the only source of teaching. In planning the alternative school we must stress the same ideals. It is mostly a do-it-yourself job, and only when the participants of the alternative school experience the accompanying successes and frustrations of planning themselves will they be prepared to *manage* the system by themselves.

The Planning School

Most educational changes are drawing board efforts. One individual, or a small group, designs a theoretical problem for which the ready-made theoretical answer is prescribed, and then the result is sprung on teachers, students, and community, like letting loose a bull on a concert stage. The designers can then sit back and later comment, "We really shook them up," or "Some really exciting things happened," or "They didn't accept it because it was too threatening!"

The comments are certainly appropriate, but something seems to be missing from the planning process. We have heard, for instance, some advocates of computerized flexible scheduling judge the success

of the schedule by the amount of unscheduled time students are "assigned" during the school day. Even in the midst of chaos and controversy, the program can apparently be called a success if it has a high percentage of unscheduled time.

The real criteria for success of a schedule are not the gaps, however, but the planned options available for students to fill in the gaps. And therein lies one of the secrets to successful planning—sensitively matching the innovation to the available resources or, as Howard Hill says, "getting to know the territory."

By carefully managing the planning we will have planned the management, that is, the system responsible for and accountable for carrying out and leading the program. In the Pasadena Planning School, *no* utopian vehicle was developed for educational planning. In fact, the management was a near fiasco, and because of it the whole effort came within an eyelash of self-destruction.

> The one thing that we definitely have not achieved is organization. Everyone seems to be so concerned about goofing off and thinking only about themselves, that no one seems to care about an education, only good relations and stuff like that. I *need* to learn, and I'm not. I also think that if we have more organization, we wouldn't have so many conflicts. People are *bored* so they pick fights. The advantages are definitely there, and ready to be used, but we can't get there without organization.—a student

Consequently, we hold up no model management for future success. On the contrary its usefulness will probably best be determined by judicial avoidance of its shortcomings. Nevertheless, the Pasadena school *was* continued, *was* increased in size, *was* very different, and did *not* unnecessarily shock its constituents. The idea still has merit even if its leadership did not.

The planning school—a concept first suggested by Richard Clark at the University of Massachusetts School of Education—is new in education. It is considerably riskier than the conventional drawing board planning process, which usually turns an administration idea into a pilot program, which in turn dies out when its initiators no longer have the enthusiasm, the energy, and the dedication to continue.

The planning school concept suggests that the implementers plan as they go along with a minimum of prescription. The testing period is concurrent with designing so that change in the program takes place instantaneously. The backbone of the effort then becomes depersonalized as the program immediately becomes the property of the students, parents, teachers, and administrators involved.

The inherent danger here is that although this idea may be generally accepted by the responsible decision makers, it will also be grossly misinterpreted by them. The purpose during the short life of the school is to experiment and plan—not to demonstrate. Voluntary enrollment is thus crucial. It is no longer the creator but the creatures who push the program forward.

The purpose involves a process that finds goals and objectives as it develops. Although the rational approach suggests that goals be determined at the outset, perhaps the planning school demonstrates that after students and parents and educators have had a chance to muck around a while, goals and objectives become easier to develop and certainly more realistic in terms of direction, desire, and feasibility. At least, this is the intention. The Pasadena school unfortunately became so immersed in internal conflict and survival issues that it often lost sight of its mission. The planning school was created to plan another school for the future. But while it speculated, questioned, and designed for tomorrow's world, it was itself expected to perform according to yesterday's rules and regulations. New procedures for analysis will be needed. For in the planning school, we sometimes start with a result and end with a goal.

Extreme tolerance and interpersonal respect are also demanded. In conventional planning approaches, and individual designing a model can appear very direct, very clear, and very efficient because of the absence of different viewpoints and distractions. The approach called for in the planning school appears sloppy and circuitous in comparison. It is temporarily frustrating and often morale-bending for its personnel. Students, staff, and parents who have experienced and survived the demands of this kind of shared decision making (some did not survive), however, have taken long strides forward in developing their own appreciation of diversity and their own education in and of the democratic process and the process of learning.

Taking planning off the drawing board and placing it in reality adds another important dimension to the process. Planning in a real-time context must make not only effective but affective decisions. It will take longer and harder effort when the feelings of groups are considered, but there will be no need to try to sell the final result. In fact, it was the sincere enthusiasm of parent and teacher "victims" that convinced the school board and the district administration, who originally created the Pasadena Planning School, that the school should be continued beyond its first shaky trial period!

The distinction between the planning school and the "final model"—in this case the alternative school—will become more difficult to make as the effort continues. The plan eventually finds itself

to be the model. The process is something like approaching infinity—the model will never fully be attained, but the difference will become infinitesimal. No final blueprint will ever be produced. At some time in the future, the name will probably change from planning school to alternative school or to some other name, but no other new beginning will take place.

> I have been somewhat disappointed that the progress is so slow but I still do not ever want her to return to her previous school. I have great hopes for the alternative school for next year.—a parent
>
> Now go!—a parent

Although the planning school was no shining success, it has highlighted some of the concerns in the management of planning. Consideration of these planning concerns will help develop a management system that allows for the free and full expansion of the alternative school design through its toddling stage.

Governance

Call it management, administration, or anything else—alternative school developers should establish who is in control and what the system of governance is. It is the question of control that separates the men from the boys. While great ideas about education are extolled, listeners who count are quietly wondering who is going to be in control—whom do you *blame* and whom do you *bill*?

Joint control, that is codirectorship, is probably doomed to failure. Even if those who are sharing the control can get along fabulously (and they won't really know until they've tried it), the individuals who must work for and respond to the directors will be confused or undirected and prone to going to mother when father says no.

This is not to say that participatory management cannot work. Shared decision making is by nature almost essential to alternative school management, but the decision-making process should not be confused with the system of accountability. Shared decision making means sharing information relevant to decisions; it does not mean enforcing sustained frustration by a demand for consensus, majority vote, total involvement of the population or abdication of responsibility. Participatory management, as an appropriate part of the alternative school in the context of today's public school system, requires careful delineation of responsibilities and definition of ultimate and secondary

accountability levels. Lack of clarity will destroy the best intentions of honorable leaders for subordinates, superordinates, and themselves in the definition of management responsibilities and decision-making procedures.

The word "autonomy" is often used in alternative school circles. As a philosophical description of experimental license the word is useful though vague. But as a description of the political, legal, and financial control for the school within the school system, the word "autonomy" is more wishful thinking than reality. Sensitive consideration of established system administrators and their responsibilities—real or imagined—must be made and probably made by individuals who are familiar with the administrative styles and duties of those actually in office.

Clearly, some individuals use control and influence to better the education of young people; some use the education of young people to better control and influence; and some do both as a strategy for greater educational change. In the alternative school, questions about the sources and exercise of authority in a democratic society become inescapable.

> Parents and students want to participate at all levels of decision making and staff selection. . . . We want to operate outside of the normal administrative structure and to have the maximum possible freedom to develop a truly alternative approach to education in Pasadena.—a parent consensus
>
> . . . as educators, we would be remiss if we gave the school to them . . . they do not have the ultimate responsibility for the education of the children. . . . It is incumbent upon the administrators and staff of an alternative school to know when, where, and how to involve the community approximately, and to communicate to the community the perimeters of their involvement so that parents very succinctly understand their involvement and are not confused relative to the decision-making process of the alternative school.—an administrator

Planning

In an end-of-the-school-year survey, a majority of the parents stated that the major weakness of the planning school was in planning! We should realize that planning for the school does not end when the school begins. On the contrary, planning is an integral part of the ongoing school program. Parents in the survey suggested more

program planning; greater goal determination for individual students by a team of students, parents, and staff; more diagnosis and guidance; a definite framework for units of study; and more follow-through by teachers. Aside from these student concerns are school planning and goal determination concerns. We must thus plan for planning.

The question of when the planning is done and by whom is critical to the alternative school. Subsystems devoted to educational change, like the alternative school, must have different administrative and teaching roles defined. Responsibilities must be assigned to direct all the additional tasks demanded. These tasks include the organization of special committees; special transportation; inservice teacher experiences; publicity; uniting philosophies; writing reports; accommodating visitors; answering public questions; designing and maintaining research systems; collecting data; informing district administrators, board members, teachers, etc.; ordering special equipment and supplies not normally prescribed; scheduling the use of consultants; educating parents; analyzing functions and defining roles; manipulating special program funding procedures; attending parent and board meetings; soliciting funding; answering complaints; rewarding extra efforts and assuaging the frustration of coworkers; entertaining; doing personal reading and study; sponsoring and going to related conferences; addressing community agencies; and just plain thinking about and understanding where the school is.

And all of this is in addition to the regular responsibilities inherent in running a school. The additional or unique difficulty presented by the change situation is that each of these regular responsibilities, placed in the context of potential attack by vulturine critics, had better be performed at least as well as in the regular school, e.g., classroom appearance, accounting for student progress, and handling of emergencies. The innovative school has a multitude of tasks to plan for and assign.

Teachers, like administrators, must take on extra burdens. In fact, their roles in the alternative school are almost completely redefined. They will probably teach more subject areas to a wider age range of students. They will be directly involved in scheduling students and classes, ordering or scrounging supplies, negotiating the use of outside resources, assigning volunteer and part-time personnel, creating new classes, and learning new subjects. The teachers in the alternative school will be forced to deal with fundamental learning problems at one-to-one eye level with students. They will have the same direct relationship with parents. The teacher, thus, negotiates resources, diagnoses student needs, and spends long hours in school talking with and planning for students. In the alternative school, the

teacher is recognized as a professional—the accepted educational expert and leader.

Most parents and educators have convinced themselves that "quality education" is directly equated to student-teacher ratio and student-teacher contact hours. The assumption is that by increasing the quantity, we automatically increase the quality. The alternative school takes direct aim on that assumption by often using fewer certified teachers and fewer contact hours.

The reality is that the student-teacher contact may very well be the time in a student's life when the *least* learning takes place. The essential ingredient seldom added is adequate planning time. The administrator spends 99 percent of his time on the battle line and rarely retreats to the hilltop, and the teacher's hilltop time is about one-tenth that of the administrator's. This lack of planning time is the factor that forces us to make so many bad decisions in education and not only not know they are bad but not know we have made them. The alternative school has a major obligation to plan and to sell planning time.

One of the most important and usually overlooked aspects of planning is the phasing of change. The alternative school will not be able to do everything it wants to accomplish immediately. Providing a training center for other teachers in the district, for instance, may be eighteen or twenty-four months down the line. Development of certain curriculum frameworks may require a year or two. Grouping patterns for students and teachers will be continually revised. Thus, in planning the alternative school it might be wise to think in four- or six-month segments with limited objectives for each segment. What will be accomplished is a question that should always be followed by the questions "by whom?" and "when?"

People

Throwing together people with like interests does not necessarily produce good education. We must be concerned with how those people will relate to each other and what their personal interests are. The greatest cost of innovation is people cost.

> I was worthless as an individual to everyone but myself and my closest friends.—an intern

Those involved in developing new programs and certainly new schools must be given regular time, responsibility, and support. These aids

are provided by established schedules for students and teachers, assigned tasks and roles, and an ongoing, flexible, and individualized professional development program.

> I felt there was a need for a period of adaptation for all those involved in the school. The change from the "structured" school to this one caused numerous frustrations and worries on the part of the students.—an intern

Alternative school developers will find that many people outside of the staff—university, community, and district personnel—are willing to give up considerable time to make the effort succeed. But this contribution will be more burden than aid unless someone is assigned to provide them with an orientation to the school, specific role and duties to accomplish, and a time for periodic review of progress, which is part of the ongoing staff development program.

It is particularly important that students understand what role they are to take. What decisions will they be able to make about the direction of the school? When and where will these decisions be made? Can they make suggestions, and if so who will listen to them and when? Must students attend school daily? May they smoke? drink coffee? go to the local store?

One student of the planning school commented that the staff had expected too much of students in terms of decision making. Starting off by asking students to help plan a school is something like taking a novice to the top of a ski jump. Decision making, like the unstructured day, needs some breaking-in time. The gradual acceptance of greater responsibility will be part of the overall plan.

When a student said to one of the two school principals (me) during a group planning session, "Phil, will you shut up!" a certain plateau had been reached. The comment was appropriate and accepted and brought student and administrator closer together. But the connotations of the remark tell much about some of the school stereotyping we must get rid of before we can really expect students to share responsibilities.

Information

To a great extent, the success of the alternative school will most likely be judged by people with a secondary relationship to the school. A systematic design to inform those people will be helpful. Within a public school situation, this information network will include

communication with other schools in the district, appropriate administrative divisions of the district, the school board and superintendent, the community, the parents of the school, the students in the school, and all universities, colleges, or other agencies directly related to the alternative school. By systematic information system is meant a series of letters, reports, meetings, press releases, and other notices by designated individuals at specific times.

Alternative school developers have a monumental selling job to do. They must not only create an entity that by nature of its being is critical of the established system, they must then convince the system that the child is a deserving member of the family wanting to be cared for and loved. This is a mission of exquisite diplomacy. There is no room for boasting, arrogance, or disdain. If the school becomes a "don't bug me" effort, it will also become a "don't expect support" effort.

Someone should be put in charge of public relations and diplomacy, and everyone involved with the school should be aware of and agree to the strategy. One stray comment, one personal agenda to overthrow or malign may erase all the positive progress made.

The school district should be given prime consideration in this information strategy. Has there been some dipstick measurement made of the district feeling for change? Is timing bad or good for innovation? What has been the history of change attempts in the district? Are you kicking a dead horse? Is support being given by the superintendent, or are lower links in the chain supplying the only encouragement? How does the board feel towards "permissiveness," "humanistic education," "open classroom," "experimentation," and other potential red herrings? How will the teachers and administrators be convinced that the extra money being spent for this program can be justified? Is the district fighting other budget cuts? Do other schools want competition or will they react by attempts to isolate and discredit? Are existing strengths in other schools being overshadowed and underrecognized by the new school?

The message is not that these factors are to be considered reasons for not continuing. Rather, it is wise to recognize the situation as it exists and plan to meet it with courtesy and cooperation. No amount of recorded student progress will match the good feelings several significant people in the district have about the school. Being asked to participate, being kept informed, and being thanked occasionally for support provided are three ways that help people to feel good.

A boon to communication is the open display of progress or performance. Asking the staff and students of the school to regularly post or describe student performance not only provides information

but puts the staff and students in a mind set that says, "What am I trying to accomplish?" It took eight weeks for the staff of the planning school to succumb to the traditional idea of a posted schedule, but this simple schedule board visible to students, teachers, and parents made the program more comprehensible to all. Visible display of program options, student choices, and student progress helps to make record production and record keeping less of a chore. Desk drawer, file cabinet, or mental record keeping invites chaos when flexibility is the goal. In addition to the internal clarity open records create, information for outside interests will be readily available and easy to accumulate and reproduce. Content and performance within the alternative school is no better than the extent to which it is recognized by others.

Financing

By nature of its importance, finding money for the alternative school is a problem that is unlikely to be overlooked. The fact is clear, however, that the overwhelming majority of alternative schools that have closed (and the majority have closed) were closed because of lack of adequate support.

One of the potential hazards in the initial stages of planning is the tempting assumption that pieces will fall together by acts of God. Budgeting an alternative school must include specific provisions of such things as site, rooms, outside space, and facilities; nursing and medical supplies; heat; janitorial services; number of phones and phone lines; storage space; chairs, tables, desks, couches, chalkboards, projectors; T.V. installation; duplicating for classroom use, quality duplicating for school board and community information; typewriters, playground equipment, files, shelves, rugs, laboratory and shop equipment. How are books going to be obtained and when? How will students be transported to use outside resources? Are drivers and vehicles available? Is food service available, and is it appropriate in terms of school philosophy and diplomacy? Will there be enough materials—paper, pencils, typewriter ribbons, chalk, clay, wood? Is there money for renovation and equipment repair? In short, the alternative school needs more than good intentions. Believing that these necessities will somehow be found or contributed will inevitably result in operating a second-rate program that will be being judged on first-rate standards.

Investigation should also be made into other concerns that might

indirectly be related to financing the school. Has legal educational aid been requested to review building codes, budgeting restrictions, curriculum requirements, insurance, and so on? Can other district facilities—classes, libraries, art studios—be used by alternative school students? Can the student participate in sports events, band concerts, and special programs?

Sometimes the hope of the school hinges on outside support. Outside money cannot usually be counted on, but alternative schools are rarely begun without some kind of substantial public or private grant. Most of this additional funding comes through universities or federal agencies. Is there any available?

Problems sometimes develop in transferring budgeted amounts whether public or outside into "spending money." Strict budget categories often prohibit utilizing available money to meet unanticipated needs.

These are some of the factors that ought to be considered in planning costs of the alternative school. Alternative schools have probably begun with a few hundred dollars per pupil and sometimes go as high as a few thousand dollars per pupil.

Most proponents of the alternative school argue that the school need not and should not cost more than other schools in the district. In other words, the average cost per pupil in the alternative school would be less than the average cost per pupil in another school. In saying this, however, the alternative schooler will always stumble on the district argument that even though it costs no more per pupil, it will cost the district and the taxpayer considerably more. The argument goes that if five students are removed from each elementary school in the district, the budgets of those schools will not be affected one jot. Where does the money come from, then, for the alternative school? It is unlikely that any school is going to chop $500 or $1000 from its budget for each child going to the alternative school. Clearly, the money for the alternative school will come from some other category in the existing budget, or new tax money will have to be raised.

In addition to this serious negotiating problem is the additional problem of fixed costs for the district. Not all of the money and possibly no more than half the money advertised by the district as per pupil expenditure can actually be made available to the alternative school. For a multitude of reasons, a considerable proportion of the system budget is spent on district overhead.

The frustrations of a teacher in the Pasadena Alternative School shows the need for careful and detailed planning for school costs. And this was a planning effort which spent considerable time and effort discussing school costs.

The Planning School's gains were made, I must note, under inconceivably hostile circumstances for 1972 America, from the uncomfortable, inadequate furniture to the tight quarters, long without books, AV equipment, tools, red tape cutters (we have never yet received the newspapers requested the first week of school)—(vocabulary books took months to arrive—ad frustration)—set-up time, or even a compatible (mature?) staff.

Planning for the management of the alternative school can follow no established blueprint, but the experience of others can provide far better guidelines than naivete and hope.

8

INFLIGHT CORRECTION

Dwight Allen suggests that landing a vehicle on the moon is extremely difficult if the entire journey has to be precisely and unalterably set before blastoff. Obviously, a minuscule miscalculation on earth becomes a major failure as the spacecraft travels moonward. But, as Dwight adds, we have used a technique that has much simplified the problem of accuracy. It is called inflight correction. That is, if we concentrate our energies on getting the rocket launched, we can successfully reach our destination by a series of directional adjustments while the vehicle is traveling.

In education, we have seldom been permitted to take advantage of that simple and sensible strategy. We seem to be committed, instead, to a routine of preplanned, pre-evaluated, no-error experimentation. We pour so much energy into planning for perfection before launching a new program that the mission becomes lost in frustration, compromise, boredom, or old age.

Historical Perspective

Looking from the moon, the history of the flight of Apollo Pasadena would look something like this: A preplanning stage of just four months included task forces, strategy meetings, university-district courtship and engagement, community discussions, and a steering committee proposal. A planning school stage lasting six months consisted of staff, student, and site selection; an operating school with fifty students;

and a series of spins, nosedives, and near-disasters both at the ground-control center and on the spacecraft. Stage three was the first major inflight correction, lasting two months. Stage four was the alternative school flight from July, 1972, to the present. Many corrections are still being made as it nears its destination.

The phenomenon of inflight correction may have significant theoretical importance—perhaps as significant as the alternative school itself—and therefore deserves some microscopic attention. We shall examine the simple events that took place in Pasadena between July and September, 1972.

During the last month of school operation, it appeared as though the planning school had begun a fatal crash dive. During that time, several critical events had occurred: the assistant superintendent's sudden dismissal of undergraduate interns and his urging the school board that the school be terminated; the codirector's recommendation against the establishment of an alternative school, saying he didn't believe that the district should continue to use children for experiments; the lack of a place to house the school for another year; and the fact that only one of the twelve full-time staff was scheduled to return.

Obviously, a major midcourse correction was in order. Added to these specific mechanical problems there were other dubious instrument readings. Ralph Hornbeck, superintendent of schools, had resigned and Ray Cortines, who voted against the school, was considered an unannounced candidate. (He later was appointed to the post.) Because of decreasing enrollment, several schools were being closed (hardly time to open a new one). The school budget was being cut by one million dollars (not an opportune time for costly "experiments on children"). The press were picking at the bones of the ailing school ("Alternative School: What's Going On?"; "Alternative School, Controversy Point"; "Administration Hits University Assistance"; "Alternative School in Limbo"; "Alternative School Scrapping Asked").

A board member, Ann Hight, summed up the feelings of many when she suggested a proceed-with-caution format to the board.

> Very few argue with the concept of an alternative school—many question whether we can afford to spend monies on it now, in these times of financial cutbacks. The idea of reopening a site that we were considering closing only compounds the financial restraints we are facing.
>
> When we first started talking about an alternative school and the planning phases that would lead up to this, Mr. Lowe (board president) described this period as an "engagement" between the University of Massachusetts

and ourselves. The opening of the alternative school would be the start of the "marriage." Well, we have been engaged for almost a year now, and we have found out that, in my opinion, the marriage needs to be given more thought—judging from the engagement period. I suggest that we dissolve the engagement and get back to a friendly dating period—with U/Mass and other universities and colleges. . . .

Just because we are not as far along as I had thought we would be does not mean that the idea of an alternative school program should be scratched. . . .

In spite of some of the difficulties and because of some of the successes we have experienced, I feel very strongly that the alternative school can have a healthy impact on educational change in our district. . . .

On May 23, 1972, superintendent Ralph Hornbeck recommended that the school continue for one semester with 50 to 100 students—preschool through grade 12. Some of the conditions he set guided the midcourse correction.

(1) The school district would be in charge.
(2) There would be only one director.
(3) The University of Massachusetts and other colleges and universities were encouraged to give assistance.

Directorship

Everyone, particularly the codirectors, had recommended the abolition of joint direction. It was a paper idea that did not translate to reality. Much of the difficulty of codirectorship in Pasadena stemmed from a distinct personality difference, but other factors such as clashing philosophies, conflicting loyalties, and a divided staff all operating within an extremely difficult, frustrating, and hazardous mission made the arrangement impossible. When one codirector stated in a public board meeting, "It really has been an unfortunate situation for me," and added that for the first time in his years of teaching in Pasadena he hated to go to school because he didn't want to see what was happening to students, a prominent citizen sitting next to me who had played an important part in promoting the school quietly gasped, "Finally, we know what all the trouble has been!" She was not assessing blame; she was recognizing the schism in the school's basic conviction and the terrible chaos that schism had created. It was time for new direction.

Greta Pruitt brought to the school a breath of optimism and a vitality

based on a life of experience in very challenging educational situations. She was unanimously accepted as the new director by students, parents, old staff, and the central administration. She had been a principal in several difficult schools and was known in Pasadena as an independent scrapper. She had a reputation as a top sergeant who commanded not by order but by example. She had only one cause—to succeed. She had an outrageous compassion for children, and the more difficult the child, the greater was her compassion. Greta was just the right rhubarb for the sickly school.

University Involvement

The condition of sole ownership by the Pasadena Unified School District was more a matter of emphasis than a matter of practice. In a December, 1971 memo it had been established by the district and university administrations that the school district "had to be in charge because of its responsibility for the students and to the community. . . . The Pasadena Unified School District was acknowledged to be the 'senior partner' with U/Mass in an important supportive and innovative role." In a report to the board two months earlier, the codirectors had recommended ending codirectorship, and the university had already agreed to play the role of consultant to the district. Pasadena, however, has a passion for cleaning up its garbage, and the university was willing to act as a receptacle to dump the trash so that the school might survive. The administration's rap on the knuckles for those miscreants from Massachusetts was thus meant as a reminder to the university and the public that the School of Education people had overplayed their role in getting the vehicle off the pad, and that it was now time to acknowledge a complete switch to a stage two power source.

In recognition of this changeover, Ray Cortines and I developed a plan of action that included sixty-four specific considerations plus a budget and a time line for the transition period. The main topics addressed in this approved plan were enrollment, staffing, site, summer program, university contribution, model development, and operational procedures. The midcourse correction had begun.

The university responded to its role as consultant by supporting a summer training program for the new staff, six of whom would be graduate and undergraduate students. The training program included an orientation to the district, orientation to the school, and some curriculum and staff development work. Greta Pruitt, parents, and

new members of the staff organized and implemented this workshop with consultant and financial help from the university and additional consultant assistance from the district.

Redesign

A sumptuous (in comparison) site had been selected—one wing of a large junior high building that had been closed. Thus, the school moved from a three-room kindergarten suite to a large segment of an empty school complete with parking areas, science room, shop, art room, tennis courts, separate dining pavilion, gym, and enormous playing fields.

Students and parents helped interview new students, scrounge and truck supplies, repair equipment, and refurnish the new facility. In addition to working on the summer workshop, they also helped to refine the philosophy of the school. They contributed more than one thousand hours during the summer adjustment period. A mini-league of schools was created by Greta Pruitt involving two other innovative schools in the district and a course given at the school on alternatives in education was designed for Pasadena teachers. Thus, more tangible connection with the school district was intelligently effected by the alternative school.

Finally, the organization of the school was restructured. A new calendar was introduced calling for six-week terms, each term incorporating a one-week evaluation period. With the help of the University Center for Research and Evaluation, a complete evaluation design for students was created during the summer and readied for the fall. New student advisory strategies were developed. An integrated day program for four- to eight-year-olds was planned, and a block of time was established for older students to meet each morning in multi-aged groups with a team of teachers for skill development.

The following description of the 1972-73 alternative school was written as an aid to new parents and visitors to the school. It also helped to focus the general purpose and design of the program for the district staff and the school staff.

Pasadena Alternative School

The 1972-73 fall semester Alternative School is both a continuation and a beginning. It is a continuation of the Planning School process begun the previous spring and also a beginning of the Alternative School with new leadership, increased enrollment, and a transfer to an expanded facility.

PHILOSOPHY

The fall Alternative School has a two-fold purpose: to build a model for an expanded Alternative School, and to provide a successful educational experience for its students. The basis of the school is the utilization of alternative resources and processes for public education. Its uniqueness is a group of students, parents, volunteers, and staff personally committed to change and working together for a viable alternative education program for all ages in Pasadena.

The Alternative School symbolizes a community of learners of all ages from a diversity of ethnic, academic, and socio-economic backgrounds who have chosen a different means of satisfying their educational needs. The Alternative School believes in the value of exploring alternative approaches to learning so that students, as well as staff, can judge the effectiveness of various procedures. The school hopes to provide the school district with an opportunity for research in innovative education and will act as a catalyst for institutional change.

PROGRAM

The Alternative School emphasizes individual help, student decision-making, a student's responsibility for learning, a broad theme and project orientation, a cooperative rather than competitive learning environment, and a flexible approach to the learning of "subject matter". Many of the benefits associated with "open structure education" are used in the school—the provision of varied community and school resources for learning, individual pacing, integrated subject matter, nongradedness, lower staff-student ratio, students teaching and learning from other students, multiple activities, student program planning, and flexible scheduling and grouping patterns.

Classes are organized around the special interests and needs of students. Students are thus allowed to devote more attention to these areas than is normally available. Certain specialized academic subjects not offered by the Alternative School will be taken by students in other schools in the district, particularly when college or other requirements are in need.

Classes are scheduled and subject areas offered in a manner that makes available several options to students. Classes will be of varying lengths, size, and structure depending on the subject matter. Weekly learning contract negotiated by the student and staff are utilized to plan learning programs and provide accountability for what a student has learned. Students wishing to prepare for college can negotiate their programs so that requirements are met in the school or through the use of outside resources.

All district requirements for graduation will be met, though the mode of instruction will be often quite different.

Basic skills, particularly reading and mathematics, are a primary part of the program with the focus being upon the integration of basic skills with the overall learning program of the school.

A basic theme of the school is "learning to learn" with students being provided with a critical awareness of the learning process regardless of subject

area, a tolerance for ambiguity, and a chance to make independent decisions about learning.

EVALUATION

Students are evaluated at regular intervals in terms of their academic and psycho-motor growth and their attitudinal development. Each student's learning achievements will be monitored and recorded with evaluation reports given to parents and students and conferences held. Credits will be assigned on the student's transcript for appropriate units earned or areas covered. Achievements will be recorded and an opportunity for experimentation will be allowed without penalizing for lack of success. Letter grades will be assigned to courses taken by those students for whom grades are required for consideration by institutions of higher education.

STUDENTS AND STAFF

The Alternative School has an enrollment of 100 students ranging in age from 4 to 17. These students were randomly selected from over 1200 applicants in creating a balanced population reflective of Pasadena ethnically and socio-economically.

The staff consists of the Director, Mrs. Greta Pruitt, two permanent certified teachers, graduate teaching assistants and undergraduate interns from the University of Massachusetts School of Education, student teachers from local colleges, and a number of parent and community volunteers. Paid hourly teachers will also be used and district and university consultants will be utilized throughout the semester in the areas of curriculum and evaluation. Individuals in the community will also be utilized for specialized instructional opportunities.

COMMUNITY AND PARENTS

Parents and community people, as well as students, will be directly involved in many aspects of the program including decision-making, resource inventory and acquisition, transportation, information and communication, curriculum advisement, and classroom assistance. Parents are assigned to task forces in these areas according to their interests and time availability.

Parents will be asked to formulate their own goals for the School and for their children. They will assist directly in the instructional process, serve on committees, attend regular town meetings, and in every sense be an integral part of the Alternative School program.

DIRECTION

The Pasadena Alternative School is a part of the Pasadena Unified School District and is under the direction of the Division of Secondary Education. As a public school, there is no tuition fee and all school aged residents of Pasadena, Altadena, and Sierra Madre are eligible to apply for the school.

A number of colleges and universities are involved with the district in the Alternative School through the contribution of graduate and undergraduate student assistance and consultation. In particular, the School of Education

at the University of Massachusetts through its National Alternative Schools Program is participating in the school through the provision of faculty and staff and the funding of the summer training component and in-service training of the school.

FUTURE

In January, 1973, the Pasadena Board of Education will make a decision regarding the future of the Alternative School. A larger enrollment for the School in February is anticipated.

A Future Perspective

The Pasadena Alternative School did not end. Thirty-nine of the forty-four students eligible to return volunteered to do so. Of the remainder, one graduated, and a few moved out of the district or went to private schools. The student who had been the life of the final day beach party returned to his old high school where the lure of playing first string on the football team outweighed an occasional round of tether ball with a seven-year-old girl. When he left on the last day of the spring semester, however, he said to us, "I'm going to miss you guys next year. I wish we had school tomorrow."

The students were joined by sixty new students selected from an evergrowing list of applicants—1,200 at last count. The administration changed and renewed its faith as did the teaching staff. The new staff had considerably more experience in open education than the old one and went to work adding needed form and substance to an established innovative spirit. Six of those staff members were from the school of education at the University of Massachusetts, where continued effort was being made to enhance the program. Staff met intensively for fifteen days prior to the opening of school, building their own relationships and roles and developing curriculum opportunities for students.

Students and staff met throughout the summer working out information systems for the district and community, determining objectives for the school and students, and readying a new eighteen-room facility on a separate campus. The first "town meeting" of the 1972-73 school year was attended by more than ninety of the enrolled parents.

There were still problems, too—space problems (too much this time), scheduling problems (at first the schedule looked more like a wiffle ball than a hard ball), equipment problems, interschool problems. But this is the reality, and reality is the sustaining curriculum of the alternative school.

A major difference between the alternative school and other schools

may actually be the nature of their problems. Most regular schools are troubled with people not fitting well into the organization. Thus, there are problems of teacher negotiation, problems of bothersome parents, problems of student attendance and student detention, problems of missing gym suits, forgotten notes and forged hall passes, problems of respect, problems of vandalism, and problems of evaluation.

In the alternative school, the troubles are in fitting the organization to the people. Thus, the problems are problems of organizing and deorganizing. Peter Drucker once said that young people today "must learn *organizing* just as they once had to learn farming." The alternative school may exist, in the final analysis, not to promote the organization—the noun—but to promote organizing—the activity. And when the organizing procedures eventually become known and crystalized, smooth, comfortable, and efficient, it will be time for reorganizing, for re-creating. It will be time to plan a new school, *the alternative school*, to something once known in the seventies by the name of "the alternative school."

This is the meaning of inflight correction, the continuous re-creation of the curriculum and the school. It is important that this adjustment for error be an accepted part of the school development. In Pasadena it came about through confusion, and it came within days of being too late, but it came. And because of the corrections, the school is much sounder and better able to continue self-correction. The alternative school opened in September, 1972, with a revitalized spirit and a new reckoning on its particular moon—the goal of improved education through choice.

9

THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL FOLK HERO

One Pasadena parent speaking to a group of visitors articulated the secret of success in any alternative school, "You've got to find extraordinary people for your staff, and you've got to find a way of mucking along until you find those people, and then you've got a chance." The Pasadena Alternative School was lucky—damned lucky. It was chosen by one of those extraordinary persons, and his continued presence has given the school a chance. When I recently asked a group of students "Do you think the alternative school could exist without him?" a chorus immediately responded, "No way!" One girl added, "When he's sick, everybody walks around asking, 'Where's Compeau?' "

In the alternative school, Compeau is the him, spelled sometimes with a capital H. He is known to administrators, teachers, parents, and students simply as "Compeau." He was referred to by one consultant as the folk hero of the alternative school. In two years of exposure to the school I have never heard anyone inside or out make a derrogatory comment about Compeau. Despite his worn out shoes and white socks, his dirty pants, his antagonism toward bureaucracy, his disregard for genteel language, his intimacy with youth, his fixation on hot rods, his irreverent political pronouncements, his beard, his ridicule of most schooling practice, his tolerance of any behavior from others, his lack of visible consideration for his family, his subversiveness within an institutional framework, and his utter unconventionality, Compeau has the respect of anyone, Tory or Whig, who spends a few minutes with him. Teachers love him, parents

love him, students love him. Long before Greta had any connection with the alternative school except as a sideline observer, she said to me, "Phil, you've got the best teacher in the district!" It is no accident that Greta Pruitt and Jim Compeau are now together in the alternative school. He needed her administrative competence to survive; she needed his teaching wisdom to succeed.

As a director of the school during those early months, I had two sickening and persistent fears, "What was the university going to pull next?" and "What if Compeau is absent?" The university failed me many times; Compeau, never. Compeau never was absent; none of us could afford it. He planned the daily schedule, made the staff assignments, arranged for guest appearances, scrounged the necessary supplies, announced to the students each morning what was going to happen that day, taught the classes, played in the soccer games, counseled those in need, expounded the school philosophy to the staff, maintained the records, . . . His whirlwind activity leaves normal humans in awe, not because of the speed of his actions but because of the depth of his concentration and application. And through all of this, Compeau's greatest quality has been his humanity—his tolerance, his humor, and his optimism.

Jim continues to be ultimately human while many of us erect facades, particularly as teachers, pretending that we should maintain neutrality, pity, fairness, and absence of emotion. Generations of this kind of teacher and parent modeling have indoctrinated us in the belief that morality is shaped by opportunity, not conviction, and that the best passage in our world is through dissociation. The Compeaus, whose hearts and heads are heard as one voice, are few.

Jim Compeau was picked by the teacher selection committee consisting of administrators, undergraduate interns, parents, and students. In retrospect, I imagine it was he who chose us. At that interview, he spoke of children, not pedagogy, and he spoke of means, not philosophy. We had been up to our ears in promises and exciting rationale. What we needed was help with how to get there. Compeau's talk of films, cars, and community resources was a welcome relief to the steady stream of experiential ecstacies, affective afterthoughts, and flexible flimmingjams we had been hearing and speaking. He was a unanimous choice by the committee, but we had only seen the tip of an iceberg. From that day on, Compeau lived with us. He was the alternative school. If Compeau went to the beach, the school went to the beach; if Compeau went horseback riding, so did the school; if Compeau went to the Colorado River, the river became the alternative school. In the first six months I worked with Compeau, I never remember him going home for dinner. He exists

on learning—his own and other's.

Compeau is as dependable, as consistent, and as honest with staff members as he is with children. He is always available. In staff meetings, Compeau seems at first aloof, almost uninterested, half clowning. He is working at two levels, getting people to feel at ease and listening to the issues. Compeau believes in giving everyone a chance. He believes that however radical or reactionary the argument seems, it is right until proven wrong. This behavior is not altruism. It is Compeau's way of finding the best in everything and everyone. His attitude is always one of receptiveness, willingness, positiveness. He is quick to provide comic relief when frustration or ill-feeling or fatigue begin to dominate. On many occasions, it has been Compeau who has offered a solution in a meeting that has been hopelessly tangled in confusion.

A Group of Students Talks About Compeau

"He's the best teacher."

"He's open."

"He's comfortable."

"He's funny."

"He makes up these math problems that are really funny. Like seven white cows gave regular milk and seven brown cows gave chocolate milk."

"He spells cows C-A-U-Z."

"Yeah, he writes all his words together."

"He's a nice guy, anybody could get along with him."

"He walks funny; he talks funny!"

"He's really a good teacher."

"He teaches anthropology, self-defense, auto, algebra, unspelling, how to buy a used car, hip lit, knee lit, physiology, shop, soccer, pre-hip lit, vocations, fabrication, and repairs."

"He teaches toot-toot. That's tutoring in math, reading, and spelling."

"He teaches Algebra 1 and Algebra 1 point 3 and Algebra 1 point 5. Eric helps him with Algebra 1 and Algebra 1 point 3, but Compeau has to do Algebra 1 point 5 himself because it's really difficult. He gives us really hard problems."

"Hip lit is present day stuff, not all that old junk, *Tale of Two Cities* and stuff."

"Yea, but knee lit and pre-hip lit go back in time. We read a lot of books."

"Algebra is fun. I wouldn't want to cut that class. The math problems are fun. I go up to Compeau and say, "I want algebra!"

"He talks about when he was young and what he did. He talks about his teachers. He says they had the wobblies. Wobblies are the fatty parts of old ladies' arms that hang down. He says their wobblies jiggled when they shook their fingers at him. Compeau has a million stories about himself."

"This is his kind of environment because he can teach what he wants—what he is interested in—to his fullest. He can make friends with the students. Public schools say, 'All you can be is a teacher.' In public schools teachers don't talk to you. Compeau takes students to movies, to the junkyard, to pizza parlors. He lends you money or gives you a piece of pizza. He gives you books. He really trusts you. I tell him, 'Compeau, you're such a softie.' But that's his way. He doesn't have any money, and yet he's always giving stuff away."

"He must know so much. He knows so many things. It seems he knows everything, but he's also such a nice guy. It's uncanny since the beginning of the year what I have learned."

Compeau in Action

Here is Compeau in the notorious Algebra 1.5—a lesson on the relationship between the size of angles in a triangle and length of its sides.

Compeau draws an angle on the board.

Compeau: "How big is that?"
Kids: "Thirty degrees."
"Fifteen degrees."
Compeau: "Let's say it's twenty six degrees. How long do you think this side is?"
Kids: (nothing)
Compeau: Picks up nearby pencil case. Measures line. "Two and one half gizmos."
Compeau: (draws an angle) "How big is that?"
Kids: "Forty-five degrees."
"Thirty degrees."
"Forty degrees."
Compeau: "It's thirty-one degrees."
Compeau: (draws a very, very thin angle) "I'm trying to draw a one degree angle." Puts his eye on the blackboard and looks up along

the two lines. That's it. "How long is the side?"
Kids: "About a zillion."
Compeau: "What if we keep making the angle smaller?"
Kids: "The side could be infinity."
Compeau: "What?"
Kids: "Infinity."
Compeau: "What?" (softer voice)
Kids: "Infinity."
Compeau: "What?" (softer)
Kids: "Infinity."
Compeau: "What?" (a tiny squeak)
Kids: "Infinity!"
Compeau: "What's Infemininitity?"
Kids: "You write it like a sideways 8."
Compeau: (finds an X on the blackboard and closes it with parenthesis making it an infinity sign) "See, I never miss a trick—saves chalk, you know."

And so it goes, constant dialogue, constant challenge, constant humor. Always juxtaposing the absurd with the very real. Always taking advantage of every occurrence, every emergent need or disruption. Never does the lesson plan interfere with the lesson. And during it all, five students sit quietly on the periphery of the algebra class, and the action, reading magazines and comics. They are not taking algebra like the others, but Compeau draws them like a light bulb attracting moths. What do they learn? That algebra can be respectable, that learning can be fun, that a teacher can be a real person, that the school is their home, to use as they please.

There is another dimension to Compeau. But it can't be told. The private rights of students and others must be secure. Without any doubt, Compeau has been directly responsible for saving the lives of individuals. For just as he is a counselor in the classroom, he is a source of guidance outside of it. When all the world tumbles in on adolescence, Compeau is there to give firmness, sympathy, and support. For Compeau, there are no bells, no lesson plans, no eight-to-three days. For Compeau, life is the school—its schedule, its buildings, and its mission.

This, then, is Compeau, the best secondary teacher I have ever known. Like a great artist, his competence is certainly not a factor of personality and characteristics alone. His competence is in his art, his teaching, his students. He is no newcomer to the profession. Hundreds of young men and women have passed through his caring and creative hands. Ask his children, as I have done, about his skill.

Better still spend time with him. Listen. Reserve judgment. Expect the best, the very highest motive. There is a strain of purity running through Compeau, an unusual blend of innocence and experience.

The alternative school is lucky to have Compeau. Perhaps only the alternative school, though, could *have* Compeau. He was ready to give up teaching; the alternative school lured him out of "retirement" and disgust. Can alternative schools find and attract other Compeaus? Can education survive if they don't?

10

A LEARNING COMMUNITY

I have used the term "community" over and over in my two years of living, learning about, and looking at the alternative school. I believe that community *is* the focus of this particular school. Other alternative schools might have as a focus special interests, vocational education, college preparation, freedom, or the arts. Some are thus established for particular content, some for particular values, and some for particular people. I wrote the following as an introductory comment some time ago. I believe it still pertains.

> The Pasadena Alternative School is not designed for everyone. . . . it is not strictly for college preparatory youngsters nor is it solely for remedial help. Because a child has been unhappy or a failure in regular school is not reason alone to think he belongs, or will be successful, in the Alternative School.
>
> It is a totally new approach to schooling . . . an attempt to provide each student with a hope for the future and a confidence about his own abilities, with a deep appreciation for the diversity and inter-dependence of mankind, with a chance to make important moral judgments as well as academic decisions, with a consciousness and love of the learning process regardless of subject matter and time constraints, with a right to fail without punishment, with a tolerance for ambiguity and an opportunity to deal with the unknown by individually negotiating for resources, with a freedom to develop self-motivated direction through day-by-day endeavors, and with a sense of responsibility toward sensible

future career choices within the context of real social, economic, intellectual and spiritual consequences, with a love for his fellow man, woman and child.

The Alternative School assumes that the student will have primary control over *his* or *her* future. It is his or her responsibility and choice to make. The School, its staff and its parents as well as fellow students, will try to provide each student with the tools, resources and support which will help make that choice appropriate and wise. We know at this time that some people belong in the Alternative School and some people do not, but only the future and wisdom will let us determine who belongs where. We do not yet know.

To achieve this community we established two structural guarantees. The first was a cross generational enrollment or participation, and the second was a cross racial and cross socio-economic enrollment. We did the former by including students ranging from pre kindergarten to grade twelve, teachers ranging from college beginners to post doctorate trained, and, of course, parents. We achieved social diversity by establishing quotas which were roughly the same as the school district distribution. In ethnic terms the school was and is fifty per cent Caucasian, thirty five per cent Black, twelve per cent Chicano and three per cent Asian. Let us look a little more closely at these two characteristics; first, cross generational grouping and second, integration.

We have had problems from the very beginning with cross age grouping. Our first space utilization plan was the Little Kids' Room and the Big Kids' Room; we still have it even though only days after opening we were lectured in a town meeting, "I hate being called a little kid!" Compeau tells of the unrealized dreams and the undreamed realizations as follows:

The 3 A's (Anthropology, Algebra, and Auto Mechanics) and K-12

Anthro Six was a course studying six cultures—Yanomamo, Eskimo, Samoan, Cheyenne Indian, Ik, and Arapesh. Its students spanned adolescence, roughly, from thirteen through seventeen. The one ten-year-old was an exception, primarily a spectator at the other kids' studies. This is not much response to Dwight Allen's contagious obsession that the generation gap needs some spanning and all ages can help each other learn through maximum cross-age grouping. But the door is always open, which is not usual in public education.

Judy Peterson, a teacher who works primarily with primary young-

sters, brought a seven-year old into the algebra class since he had expressed a desire to study the subject. Had the teacher had more time, the student might have succeeded, but lessons went on as usual, and he dropped the course. Those who stayed represented grades 7 through 12, a fair range.

"Auto" made a better model. From a fourth-grader all the way to a college intern, the students were a wide mixture, and all participated fully. All listened, drew, wrote, disassembled, cleaned, tuned, timed, changed. The fourth grader probably learned as much as anyone else, judging from his papers and work, although some of the tasks were physically too demanding for his sixty or seventy pounds.

Ethnic studies includes students of all ages, down to seven years. When the school was fifty students in two rooms and not too well organized, some saw the mixing of all ages as a bigger burden than the benefits warranted. Now, at 150 students, the under-eight-year-olds spend almost their whole day with Judy and others in the integrated day room or its activities. This fact generates continual concern and complaint. Students complain about not having enough to do with the little kids. Few, however, avail themselves of the opportunities to participate in the integrated day room activities. They account for the situation by the explanatory complaint that the atmosphere in there is too structured for their comfort.

Staff members complain of the tykes being "penned up up there" but never yet have come through with activities or alternatives or even coherent proposals for a broadening of the cross-age grouping.

Integrated day instructors themselves vow continually to break loose, whenever the bullpen sends its relief. Certainly the older students value the chance to withdraw at will from the pace and noise of the younger ones. A few young ones reject the integrated day room facility and move into the upper academic strata, for better or worse. Most in integrated day are quite comfortable in the "home" and seem to thrive within it.

Perhaps the whole-school trips and events distort one's perceptions of the potential of cross-aging, but reason then vetoes the bill. When everyone camps in the mountains together, the little ones are charming and an entertainment. Older ones maturely comfort the homesick young. At a town meeting to discuss what to do about the mysteriously broken mirror, older students hold and quiet younger ones; however, there is a general sigh of relief when the younger, rowdy, restless, inattentive group finally moves out.

The rationales for cross-age grouping make sense. *And by no means could we logically exclude any student from any course of study any more.* But it may be that other reasons urge us to maximize the

practice to whatever extent all can comfortably tolerate and work within it.

Education's greatest failing, perhaps, has been the stunningly (and stuntingly) efficient destruction of both the will to learn and the confidence in ability to learn. How many volumes have cried this theme and how many people pondered that to do nothing would be better than to crush with our good intentions?

There *is* atmosphere in a place where people from eight to twenty-three or thirty-six or forty-five have come to inspect and possibly study some questions and some relationships, suggesting that indeed it is right to admit an ignorance, an incompetence, or a whole assortment of failings.

The young at the Pasadena Alternative School loan us their innocence and their right to it. They show us extremes of what we are. The Sioux regarded children as adults without experience and gave them respect. The alternative school does that, but it also admits the child in all of us and gives that respect. The children need to be held and insist on it. So do we all, but our inhibitions are strong. Until we admit and accommodate ourselves, it is acceptable to pick up, twirl, hold the little ones.

Visitors don't understand the directors being addressed as Greta or Griddle or the Prune. Some are aghast at the instructors sliding down the bannister. The joy at catching Greta eating on the new carpet in violation of her own rule was not malicious. It and her penalty (baking 150 cupcakes for the school) were celebrations of the acknowledgement that we're all learners; we all fail; we all grow and improve, thereby, without shame.

They were all children who cried all day on the last day of school at leaving each other for the summer, or longer, or forever. Only the children wept inexpressible joy and love, sorrow and fear, hope, unity. But the children ranged to many decades in age. Some of the children wept as they drove home alone afterward. Some weep today, restless for school's beginning or for the little interim trip or gathering, to be united and free, whole again.

Put any bunch of peers together and that can't happen. We are more than what we are. We are past and future as well, and need to be ever reminded of that. Cross-age grouping reminds us.

Integration

To discuss integration at the alternative school is perhaps like the living discussing death. It's taken for granted, but no one really knows

much about it, and probably no one needs to. In 1973 California, of course, that can only be true in a relative sense. There was one white who used, discreetly, the term nigger. Sometimes he asked people what they were going to when the niggers took over. They asked him what the hell he was talking about.

Aside from a very few, relatively minor vestiges or misunderstandings (some of our people are from backgrounds that did not warn them of what can be abrasive to others, did not prepare them in other ways to live with, to teach ghetto kids), people here expect full integration. They want the best staff, even if it should be purple. They want a diverse staff, to enrich themselves and to broaden understandings. They realize that our society serves itself ill if it undereducates, underpays, underrespects any group or any individual. The official commitment to a community—proportionate balance of races and other factors—firms it up.

There is a considerable residue of minority expectation of abuse, defensiveness toward it, white wariness of that, but it seems to work here to prevent frictions. Certainly in a place where coercion, repression, antagonisms are minimized, frictions such as racial strife lose their best fuel.

Where people are frequently intermingled in enjoyable, noncompetitive interdependence-promoting activities, such as backpacking, race gravitates far down the list from qualities of personality, competence, character.

Anecdotally, there are some pieces to consider. When a few kids decided to start a newspaper, Chrissie ran to a teacher and showed him the list of names. "See something funny there?"

"No."

"They're all white."

"Get on it. I think that's just who signed up, but you integrate it." She did.

A black mother remarked about a black staff member whom she did not respect, that he was important there so her child wouldn't be hit by "a sea of white faces."

At a parent meeting, one intern suggested that more "minority" kids might find the school an inappropriate educational environment than is proportionate. The whole meeting came to life in disagreement.

In private, a white student complained that all four students elected to the teacher selection committee were blacks. Asked if some action were in order, he said, "No, it makes no real difference. I just wanted to be on it and I'm white. But they're fine. Could I go anyway?" He couldn't.

There is some *de facto* segregation in classes. In ethnic studies,

a disproportionate number were black. The subject matter and the black instructor no doubt had some influence. In hip lit, a disproportionate number were white. This may relate mostly to the appalling level of reading at which many Pasadena black kids' educations have left them. The instructor was white. Both instructors recruited members of other colors actively and eagerly.

Outside classes, one can be more direct. "Get out of there," an intern shouted. "We're not taking that car. Spread out in the other cars." All the kids in the car were black.

Cliques inevitably form. The most distressing is the one comprised of high school students whose academic backgrounds, particularly reading, are very poor. They seek shelter from embarrassment and abuse in their own group. Because education has failed them, among other reasons, most of the group is black. A large amount of staff thought focuses on integrating, repairing, challenging, and rewarding that group's members. No one is beginning to be satisfied with the results.

Some of the interns, not always intentionally, found themselves behaving in a manner that challenged black students, two in particular. Twice this provoked a controlled physical attack, specifically, shoving and blows to the chest, by one, a 6'5" seventeen-year-old. Naturally enough, the aftermath was fear, resentment, a report to officials, school, and police, subsequent resentment, and recognition that the staff and the students, too, now had a problem to discuss. The staff meeting started out as a personal attack-and-defense between a black part-time teacher and a white intern. It progressed to a professional discussion of the underlying causes, some constructive suggestions for adjustments in staff dealings with the two quick-tempered students in particular and others in general, and a general optimism about the next times.

Among the underlying causes were noted:

(1) Challenging responses to students—attempts to dominate or subordinate them.
(2) Domineering treatment of younger children.
(3) Too-familiar and too-protective behaviors with nubile female students. However innocent, such behaviors inevitably arouse jealousy in male peers. Some, more of them black, tend to react physically.
(4) Need of male students for intimacy that male staff are awkward or insensitive in meeting.

Suggestions for improvement included:

(1) Sheltering an attacked student instead of restraining attacker.
(2) Putting attacker off the defensive. "What did he do to you to make you so angry?"
(3) Role-playing the recent occurrences with the principals involved, for videotape, with various responses, for future staff training, and to promote the principals' objective thinking on the matter.

In addition to an optimism about the next times, the meeting broke up with a stronger hope and expectation for the staff's future cooperation and for the school's strength and accomplishment.

Compeau's remarks present a different dimension of the school—a dynamic rather than retrospective cut. A more generalized reaction was one I received in conversation with four students, two white and two black. In exploring the depth of integration, one white girl challenged a black classmate, "Why do all the black boys go around with you. Why don't they ask me out?" In a quick review, the group could think of only one interracial couple.

But the black girl's response to the question of integration was more positive. "The school is perfectly integrated. If I was at my old school, I wouldn't be caught dead hanging around white people. Here we don't think of color. We're just like one big family."

Community is multidimensional and always changing. It is harmony and caccophony, balance and conflict. It is also people. A community is a blend of individual contributors. Perhaps the truest way to illustrate the community is to crawl inside of it and to eyeball its citizens. Again, Compeau tells the story of Kim.

Kim came to us at the school's beginning. She was not communicative; in at least one typical group activity, for instance, she wouldn't tell her name. She was not particularly tense nor hostile, however. Throughout the school's first semester when she most visibly played Scrabble, involving herself in little academic, she was changing in the school environment. There was no one approach or technique or key to the change. The fact seems to be that, mainly, the school did very little with her. It accepted her, it offered many opportunities, activities, and responsibilities but forced none. In the next year, that change continued and accelerated. She regularly attended classes in algebra, ethnic studies, literature, spelling, talk back, famous trials, psychology, and vocations with interest, and profited hugely. Socially, she has been very poised, but in a free and most straightforward way. Her services on school committees have been invaluable. With the teacher selection committee, her questions of teacher applicants have often been startlingly perceptive. One, which she felt it necessary to ask several applicants, was a little poignant. "What would you

do," she queried, "with a student who just played Scrabble all day, every day?"

Except for special education classes, one sees few students more hostile than Robin, especially in a noncoercive environment. A racially sensitive (not to say aggressive) black adolescent, she ranted and swore continually. She stomped out on guest speakers, shouted, snarled, threatened everyone. The mock arguments and fights she regularly staged with her white friend, Barbara, were frighteningly realistic.

Those two girls set up a store to sell candy and other sweets to students. Some staff and parents felt that more nutritious inventories were in order. Robin didn't agree. She earned what to her were significant profits. She organized an after-school dance group of younger girls from the adjacent elementary school. After practice, they often held classes in spelling and arithmetic. Algebra was the subject in which Robin felt most confident. She accepted the tutoring of Tony, a U/Mass intern.

Perhaps the break first showed when she and Barbara told the staff, compassionately, of their close friend Roger's stealing. He and the school needed help. Later some money was stolen from Gerry, the secretary, who taught Robin typing in spare moments and who offered her friendship, though it was only partially, guardedly accepted. Robin recovered the money to return, and although it was again stolen from the plain envelope on which she had drawn Gerry's name and a heart, we saw the sign.

This year, her hostility diminished further and faster. No longer did she train her young protégé, Kelly, in the hostile arts. She drew a great poster for Greta. She disagreed often and loudly with Greta. The poster, taken from "Peanuts," said, "What a team, and I had to be the manager!"

On one afternoon well into this year, a teacher was driving Robin home. About the school as an experiment, as an educational beginning, he said, "Well, we seem to be coming together." Robin took it in a spiritual sense.

"Yes," she replied, "all but James." James was an exceedingly violent male of fifteen whose gigantic efforts at self-control, with our constant help, left him only a moderate threat.

"Mm," the teacher agreed. "He is a little hard to get along with."

"A *little*? Shit!" Robin said. "*He's* worse that *I* was."

She is, at the time of this writing, most considerate, most friendly, very courteous, and still outspoken. She's becoming a fine citizen and a fine person.

Andy came in the school's first fall. Eight years old and healthy, he hadn't much experience with open education. He seemed to

promptly and completely accept the leadership in mischief of a boy two years older. They set a fire outdoors, broke windows, hid, rolled things down halls, crossed the busy boulevard. Greta warned and counseled him daily, and soon told his parents of her concern that his judgment endangered him. The problem continued. His parents transferred him back to his former school before the semester.

Gail, as do many when the bit and bridle and reins are off, talked and laughed for her first six weeks. Her participation in classes was token and obtrusive. Dress and makeup were garish. At the sixth-week conference, her advisor suggested that effort be made at home and at school to, gently, urge more academic involvement. It began.

By year's end, there were no more multicolored nails. She had demanded of herself attendance in "solid" academics, such as algebra, spelling, literature. But in another area, she progressed phenomenally. With school groups and outside them, she saw and heard play after film after lecture after trial after meeting. She began deep, interwoven analyses of these statements, their sources, their implications for her, for our school, for the nation, and the world. Marvelous written discussions of the events were handed in. Courses such as comparative religions and anthropology enjoyed her vigorous participation. Her parents say they had expected growth in maturity and intellect. They were astounded at its extent, as were the staff.

Doyle came in the fall. Heavily ghetto influenced, his reputation was one of nonattendance and violence. In eleventh grade, he read at third-grade level. Mrs. Peterson chased him daily to give him reading lessons. He taught football to the younger students. Many mornings he slept off. He was reasonably social and courteous from the start, with sharp exceptions. He antagonized the male interns frequently. He attended some classes but by year's end that was down to none. He couldn't be cured of smoking here and there during the school day, though he was usually discreet about it.

Though he did come to school regularly, two events mark the minimal nature of the school's success. In a capture-the-flag game, he was tripped by an intern. He insisted the intern should pay to dry-clean his pants. The intern refused. Later in the game, when the intern restrained a friend of Doyle's who was angry, Doyle attacked and hit the intern.

Earlier in the second semester, he had intended to fight another student who had confiscated his radio over a $15 debt. Bringing one knife himself, he had his younger sister carry a second one for his use. The fight was broken up before it began *in the office*, a well-chosen site?

Doyle did comply, after failing to show up for the first appointment,

with the student group's (*ad hoc*) recommendation for his penalty. He considered, discussed with a class, and delivered a speech to all 145 students. The subject was the problem's causes, its effects on him and the school, and what better course of action he might have chosen.

When the first semester of the school's existence ended, all of the staff agreed on the one student least likely ever to come to a profitable stance in the open environment. Barbara had run and chased and laughed and talked nonstop, for the semester. There were no signs (except sporadic efforts to attend physiology and math, and some time spent in philosophy class discussions) that she would pull out of an apparently serious tailspin. Her parents were greatly disturbed with behavior at school and at home.

This year, she signed up for a number of classes, and, surprisingly enough, attended fairly often. She pressed for organization of a botany class, and participated well. Her behavior was more mature and serene, more considered. No one's patsy, she was still very active. On one trip she was caught with marijuana.

Affairs political, ecological, and human began to draw her serious interest, attention, and activity. She worked Wednesdays at the Free Clinic downtown. She petitioned and campaigned for ecology causes. School governance elicited her most active and intelligent participation. Math, lit, and social studies classes, trips, and activities afforded avenues she productively followed. The school as a whole and many individuals have felt her steadying influence. Every sign at this year's end points to a highly rewarding, productive, admirable, even enviable life for her.

Probably if you take any group of fifty urban kids like the Pasadena Alternative School population, you'll get a thief. Ours, whom we'll call Roger out of courtesy and hope, was very busy, less skillful. Very soon after the school was formed, things began to disappear. Roger was an omnivorous thief, selling off his loot to buy things to play with and to elevate his standing in the cool community.

Never yet at the Pasadena Alternative School has he involved himself with studies except arts, crafts, and shop activities. He unfortunately consumes even expendables faster than he or the school can pay for them.

As soon as the school's spirit began to jell, kids started reporting Roger as the thief. The general, group-given approach (we're all in this together, we can sink by ourselves, but we'll float only if we're together and that means whoever's ripping us off has got to stop) had no effect.

Eventually, he rifled a technician's purse at the pet hospital where

the kids were able to take turns at a day of observation and participation. The school was *non grata* from then on, what with the drug supply there and all. When he was found with the money and his alibis deflated, his parents were [illegible]d in. At the conference, Roger's hair was cut short and his flamboyant clothes replaced by conservative school attire. His stepfather was angry, his mother distraught.

Roger had some history of theft. He was too small to be physically outstanding. Neither home nor school approached him from an appropriate angle. The staff members at the parent conference stressed that Roger was a popular person, or had been one, but for his personality, not his dress or possessions. His popularity was now threatened. The school couldn't stand the loss and erosion of its unity. Perhaps psychological counseling could help him see his own value and make the thefts unnecessary? The parents would seek it, and would require strict accounting of Roger's every new possession.

This year, he supervised the leather room. Nothing disappeared. He cashiered at the cafeteria. Money was stolen, but it was another student (still poorer in resources and self-image) who took it. Near the year's end, though, some small crafts tools and model plane materials were taken by Roger. Evidence was that he was active again, primarily with tools. He pursues at home the experiences school is not affording. Perhaps if the programs were good in his fields, he'd stop completely.

Staff promises to Roger and to themselves to have him admitted to some art experiences and training outside school have never materialized. We have so far been able to recognize the problem and some of its causes. More, we believe we know what is needed, but freedom is difficult for one who mistrusts and patience is expendable for a school that must survive. The boy is usually happy and the school is usually willing. This is more than Roger ever had before.

One of the new names suggested for the alternative school was Freak Haven. There are a lot of unique individuals there and few conformists, even to nonconformity. Kevin is one unique individual. Perhaps it is because he's so normal.

At first he took the common early low road, sluffing off, finally dropping without credit the two courses he was taking outside at Pasadena High School. As do all of us, he gradually became close to a number of the total group. His leanings were toward the older members, the staff. His bearing is much more adult than child, even for an eleventh grader. In the second semester, he enrolled in two courses at Pasadena City College and continued his participation in the program for students at Jet Propulsion Laboratories.

His achievements in classes here, at PHS, and at JPL, his social

interaction, his part in school governance have all been excellent. He spends much of his spare time at school reading, and is a great participant in the large group soccer riots, water fights, volley ball games. One could ask little more.

Ken fit in place immediately. His parents had played an active, perceptive, important part in the school's birth. They remain stalwart workers in its development. Ken is a young adolescent, overweight, very bright, very inquisitive.

Few of the school's physical activities have yet drawn him in. Snow sliding in the mountains and beach activities did. Beyond that, the school's serious flaws for Ken are a need for more and more substance and time. He has made outstanding progress in auto mechanics, sciences, electronics, literature, social studies, mathematics, school governance, and many other areas. He is the first, for instance, to learn to use the loaned videotape or to figure out and operate the donated Flexowriter. He teaches others. The tests show nearly six years growth in math for him this year. All indications are that it is an accurate measure. He has achieved a good understanding of early trigonometry. Ken and his parents state that such a positive emotional school experience was unprecedented and unimagined in their previous experience.

His friend Blake was heard to suggest that he be invited to Ken's bar mitzvah, which occurred in the recent spring semester. "I'll be the token black," he said. As it happened, many from the school were there, several tokens of most groups, broadening their educations while paying their respects. In such ways, and in ways much less obvious, Ken and his fellow students are putting in quite as much as they're taking out.

James was, contrary to school policy, not an applicant, not randomly selected. He joined the school at the request of other school district officials, filling one of the discretionary slots left to Greta. It was in the school's second semester that he came.

As a student at the Intermediate Opportunity School when Greta was its principal, James had become much better known to her and to Compeau, who taught there then, than were most of the school's students. Both of these staff members were unusually sympathetic with James' needs and regarded him as a boy who was basically decent and very anxious to please and succeed. This was impossible for him without much individual help, which is hard to come by in schools.

Despite his basic high promise for constructive citizenship, James responded to the urban ghetto pressure with indiscriminate violence. Greta had watched him idly smash at goldfish in their bowl with

the fishnet one afternoon. Compeau saw him ride a horse to death on a class outing. In a foaming rage, he had attacked a volunteer aide at the school who had pushed him in the chest to keep him from a student he was playfully chasing, then left school to find a weapon or an ally with which to kill the aide. He had stood out as violent among some generally violent students.

Now he was being recommended to Pasadena Alternative School after another incident of violence at Muir High School. Compeau said he was glad that he was coming to a good place. Greta said that she didn't know—he was a different person from the James of two years past.

That he was. But just more of the same. Much too often, he threatened, he disrupted, he hurt. Many students requested something be "done about him." He and Greta discussed his cruelty with smaller students, and he worked hard at improving that. He worked mornings helping teachers in integrated day, reading stories, improving his own reading with the younger children's.

An intern responded to his verbal challenge and was attacked. James later waited fifteen minutes in the same place with a club, to finish the conflict. Greta was told of his waiting by another student, and she and James talked, fruitfully.

He was under an ultimatum when a group visited from an expensive private school. The group made disparaging comments about the alternative school. Certainly some of the visitors wandered far from the school building where they were supervised. Certainly James was relatively restrained in that he only hit the guest a little. Still, it seemed to Greta, with the staff's concurrence, nothing made sense but to transfer James to Continuation High School, as the ultimatum had warned. The town meeting discussing the problem went like this:

Greta recounted the events.

A student: Kicking him out isn't gonna help.

A student: They had it coming. They've got some big mouths. I heard three of them talking and I would have kicked their butts.

A student: He was trying. He was coming along, you know.

A student: Yeah, and Continuation School isn't gonna cure him.

Greta: Let me tell you that Continuation is a good school, where James just might improve, etc.

Compeau: Listen, I've got to tell you something. Greta and I have been working with and watching him for a long time now. Three years plus. There are events in the kid's history that are scary. This is a violent young man. Some of you were suggesting a

few months ago that we couldn't keep him. But he was getting better, and I do feel this is the best place for him.

A student: Right on.

A student: Let him back in.

Greta, with explanation: No.

A student: Well, at least he should be let back in next fall.

That suggestion was voted upon and recommended. Greta said she accepted the recommendation.

And so it goes. As Compeau says, each student unique. Each individual contributing and taking away. Each individual a person and a member forming a people and a community. A community that is a learning democracy. A learning community. A school. A school of the past by the present and for the future.

11

THE COLORADO RIVER

Notes on how to make it in an alternative school:

(1) Don't stand still or somebody will snag you with some need or some job.

(2) Ask people if they can do it at some date a month hence, and they'll much more likely sign on.

Compeau stood still—in a corner, yet. Freese and Potter moved in from eleven o'clock and two. "We were wonderin . . . we hafta have somebody certificated to go on the Colorado River Trip and. . . ."

"When is it?"

"Well, about five weeks. About the twenty-seventh."

"Mm."

"Virgie's gonna be with the California Environments trip an'. . . ."

"Yeah, well, if nothin' disastrous happens before then. . . . But I really can't contribute *anything* to getting it together. I mean maybe I can drop in for two classes over the next five weeks."

"No. We're not lookin' for that. I mean if you could, swell, but . . . Just the week itself, we have to have somebody with a credential and the board has to okay it. You know. . . ."

"You'll need the van, I suppose."

"Yeah."

"Okay. I guess I can. It looks like I have to."

Twenty-three students stuck out the twenty sessions on finances, transportation, first aid, nutrition, physical fitness, and whatnot. Almost enough money had been loaned, granted, salaried, and donated to

the group, and the last bake sale stood likely to complete the minimal budget.

All parents' considerable qualms had been either allayed or placed in Higher Hands. Eric and Dave, with a few students, were poised to buy the last of the foods and the water purification tablets. All but two members of the class were strewn somewhere in the town meeting room.

"How long do we wait for Robin?"

"I *know* she's coming, I told you. Nobody answers at her house. I'm sure she's running around, getting the things for the trip."

"I'm tired of waitin'."

"Till twelve, then we oughta go."

"Okay. At eleven thirty we can eat in the cafeteria, and at twelve we leave."

"Okay."

"That's fair."

"Raise hand if you're in favor."

"Okay."

"Where's Linda?"

"She went to get some stuff at somebody's house."

"Oh, *shit!*"

"She's coming back."

"Wonderful. That is best. When?"

"She said she'd be back by twelve. She said we'd never get out of here by twelve anyway."

"Listen, you guys. I want to tell you something, and I'm 100 percent serious. I want everybody to hear it, everybody to understand it. I don't know how you feel about it, and I can't care. The consequences are possibly the school's future, certainly the future of classes and trips like this one, maybe the future in other schools of some broadening of the curriculum.

"There have to be a few taboos on this trip. One is dope. If you can't get high on the trip, on each other, stay home, get stoned out of your mind. You don't need this deal for that, and we need it for something else.

"No sex. As excellent as that commodity is," (cheering) "not everyone greets it in the same light. And we don't need anything *real* to happen, just a little gossip note. Guess who were together in Harpo's sleeping bag the first night? It might be Harpo and a tarantula, but somebody's off on a cleanup campaign, and the ax falls here.

"No ungroup trips. No violence, no play violence, which leads to the real thing. No solo trips around the other side of the hill, or demonstrations of how brave you are with some rattlesnake.

"I'm completely serious. There is a hell of a lot riding on this little trip, and I'm comin' down *hard* on anybody who can't respect that. But I hope that just for each of us to realize the size of the investment is all we need."

Don drove his van, Lucky drove the Housmans', Compeau drove his. Kids were ingeniously distributed and draped among the equipment and supplies.

Ever faithful to school principles, the caravan was broken within ten miles. Lucky and his Housmans' vanfull fell behind at a bend and a big hill and then disappeared. The other two slowed drastically for five miles, then stopped on Interstate 10. After half an hour's wait, the GM backtracked, searching for the lost brother. Neither the run nor either of two calls back to school yielded a sign. As the remaining two took on gas, Don revealed that there was a plan for such a contingency. The vehicles would meet in Blythe.

"In Blythe?"

"Yeah."

"*Just* Blythe!"

"Yeah."

"Someplace in the city of Blythe."

"Yeah."

"Well, that narrows it down some."

"Yeah. Is it that big, Blythe?"

"Yeah."

The school, updated, reacted similarly. At the next stop, mid-desert, Compeau revealed that his bus had voted to hurry ahead to try overtaking Lucky's, which must have come past unseen. Don told him then that there was a rendezvous point, Highway 95 just north of 10. Compeau swore, not to have been so informed before. (Alternative school people are hard to please.)

Fate has willed that there be a telephone booth just north of 10 on 95. It is an excellent place, in relative terms, to wait and wait. No, the school had heard nothing, yet. No, the police, whom Don also belatedly if not begrudgingly owned were to be the emergency communication medium, had heard nothing. Ricky and Steve, equipped for seven vigorous days, with money, ambled off to the nearby Sizzler Steak House and returned with complete dinners, and were set upon.

Concern for the lost bus metamorphosed into anger.

In Blythe, or much or some of Blythe, the sheriff's office has jurisdiction, not the local police. The tricky telephone devoured three dimes before contact was made. No, they had not been contacted by the missing busfull, either.

When Don arrived, he drove the more agitated of both groups to the Blythe A & W for services. School had closed down, of course, so progress was reported to Pruitt at home. In another hour, she speculated, we might need to be calling some others if nothing broke. Yet it seemed obvious that the third bus was somehow still ahead. By an hour or so after dark, all were so convinced and very angry. When the bus rolled in, and indeed from the north, it was greeted with cheers, however, and its occupants with hugs.

Compeau tried to fuel the anger by eliciting the acknowledgement that "we slowed up" at the rendezvous point, but it was only a good joke and an immense relief.

Bus 1 had found a fair place to sleep, about an hour north, and the group beamed into the smelly, buggy night. Zones of striking differences in temperature alternated throughout that last leg. The hikers would realize on the trip down, that bends in the river, nearer and less so to the road, were the cause. The fair campsite was passed by. At a trailer park farther north, the group was rejected for its size.

At the next stop, another trailer park fifteen miles beyond, Dave said it was all right to stay. They camped in three inches of fine dust, a few yards from the river. Lucky and Don slept several hours before they drove back. After they left, only an occasional power boat ripped down the middle of the night. In the morning, signs informed them that the campsite was a motorcycle run. Other signs and a question revealed that the permission Dave had relayed had been his own, but the group packed and left quickly and quietly without event after granola and jerky breakfast.

The first day saw pass four plus miles of rugged terrain, the asphalt of Highway 95. Packs hurt, feet hurt, sun hurt. Dave and Eric took turns nursing the laggards, but the line of hikers still stretched nearly a mile. Compeau drew the van and scouted ahead for places to swim, fish, sleep. Places were available, but they were all thick with people. At about the three-mile mark, the group swam in a calm digression of the river, then cooked part of a 30" carp that a stranger, bow fishing farther downriver, had donated through Compeau.

The typical, extraordinary creativity of the students erupted in efforts to weasel rides in the van. Ricky won the prize, but many earned honorable mention and loaded in their packs for the last mile of walk.

The Wheeler Inn campsite was graced that night by twenty-six full sleeping bags and the van. Besides the regular fare of granola and jerky, there were cold grapefruit juice, pop, popsicles, ice cream, and candy, at individual expense. Many noted that their survival skills were standing them in fine stead. Comfort, perfect swimming, decent

fishing, and a good time was had by all. A few complained that they weren't really roughing it. Most didn't.

Curious swarms of gnats, calculated to number more than 100 billion, spectated the foreign group till dark. The night shift was mosquitoes. The event was a round discussion of why people hold themselves back, why teachers do, and what failings those are of life and education respectively.

Perhaps all the bugs were wrapped up in the marijuana smoke and therefore didn't bother the group much. The marijuana smoke did. The nearby marijuana smokers did more. More than a few of the kids had had their battles with the weed. Some were under threat of severe penalties should they err again. All exercised the keenest and bravest judgment when the inevitable offers were made, and made again, and again.

Now it was night, and near time to sleep. Some were sleeping. A few were fishing, most were in the talk circle, or near it. The sweet smell strengthened, and two of the instructors noticed the freak who had already unsuccessfully invited most of the group's nubile girls to an evening grass event, smoking and talking with a few in the near splinter group. The two instructors instinctively monitored that situation while the important discussion progressed toward the predictable, important conclusions. A male high school student accepted one puff of the freak's illegal smoke. The two instructors conferred. Dave casually moved and spoke with the student. Compeau swore.

Perhaps it was a question as to what provoked the oath. Perhaps it was the spirit of the school; within five minutes, the group were groping for the wisdom with which to solve the problem.

The errant student said that he had been pressed and pressed, intolerably finally, to accept. It was hardly his fault.

A chorus responded that that was a cheap, excremental copout, that they had throughout the evening rejected, explained, and argued to drive the strong temptation behind them, and that surely he might withstand the first approach.

It wasn't such a big deal, and who are *you* to talk who'd had her parents in on guess-what charges last year, anyway?

Everyone was deeply angered and hurt that anyone would cash in all their futures on a narrow personal impulse.

Eventually, after impassioned argument and careful consideration, it was suggested by the group to conceal the event as well as possible, but to subject the offender to a real and relevant penalty. The two possibilities suggested were calling his parents to take him home in the morning, and allowing him to finish the trip but banning him from some future trips. All would sleep on the question. Compeau

as the certificate member would consider it further when his own anger had ebbed, and submit his feelings to the group for criticism, if not ratification. This process would determine an action.

This turned out to be (a) prohibiting the offender's participation in the next eight school trips, of which two must be major; and (b) six days (one per week) of social service work at the Pasadena Free Clinic, where a lot of heads come for help. No negative criticism of the treatment was delivered.

Morning saw seven smallish bluegills harvested, cleaned, cooked, and eaten, three students emphatically urged to clean up their scales, guts, and heads, and a somewhat wiser group on the road.

Eric was driving the van ahead and left early. His job was to find out where they could get off the road and back on.

They got off soon, down to the river. A group of four Indians drinking beer in the precious shade of a bridge hassled them about trespassing on the reservation. They were trespassing and knew it, and called back the leaders. The Indian men said they'd only been joking, though, and that it was all right.

Walking by the river was pleasant, beautiful, and although it was an unused dirt road, hardly seemed a survival exercise. Even the two rattlesnakes encountered were small and fast retreating. One student wanted to stone them to death. Another, the same who had given in to the grass hawk, wanted to see one up close. Too close for David.

He and Eric, from Massachusetts, had not yet forgotten that the snakes can kill, and the season and the official snake alert had made them more than nervous.

Dave screamed and swore, and warned the boy that one more time, I mean it, *one* more time, and you're *gone*. And there won't be any meeting.

Keeping twenty-three alternative school students together is painting the wind. Twenty-three different drummers, some very fast, some very slow.

Most kids were nursing excellent blisters; some few were in terrible physical condition; one's body was generating its first menstruation. Linda kept the second dead scorpion in half a beer can to imbed in plastic back at school.

Where the road was washed out by a caecum of the river, the group stopped. It was early afternoon, but a good breeze made the swimming chilly. The snake-and-grass offender secured permission before he rode an inner tube downstream a bit, life-jacketed and with rescuers posted. Digestive systems caught up to the schedule, and the shovels got a workout. Several students left with Eric when he arrived. They

were backtracking, going around the road, plotting the way out. It wasn't exactly a compass and spit-on-the-finger affair.

Complaints to that effect were still few, though, as a first-class fire was built and bags spread. Besides the inescapable granola and jerky, Angela cooked some rice with bouillon. The seven miles covered didn't end at a popsicle stand this time, either. It felt more right. There was some singing, some storying, some talk, much laughter, some movement from group to group, bag to bag. The web was knitting up.

Eric's group was very late returning in the van, and on the opposite side of the washout. No one crossed in the night.

In the morning, early risers saw Eric and some snake-phobic students asleep on top of the van. Its top was a little bent, so Compeau swore.

But they had procured a flat of eggs to enliven the morning menu. Crossing was no problem since the river level dropped four feet at night, and the washout was only a six-foot-deep mud canyon. Dave and Eric insisted that the river was turned on only in the days, for tourists. Perhaps it was the eggs that caused the grumbling about its not being a survival trip at all.

The egg farmer had invited the group to camp on his ranch if they pleased, where they might return his kindness by turning on some irrigation valves, also if they pleased. Rain threatened, so some of the tube tents were cut up for ponchos by teams, and draped and taped on everyone. Walking was sweatier within them.

The threat grew until in an hour or so the clouds dropped their burden. After a few minutes' sprinkling, it was over. The group had survived. It was decided to camp at the kind man's citrus ranch, necessitating a 90° angling out from the river, and hot, dry road walking. Dry except that the ponchos kept the sweat in until the wearer would tolerate it no longer, stop, peel it off.

Other clouds formed over the girl whose foot was sore and whose impending menstruation was as yet unsuspected except within her body. Anger was very common now, and already growing bitter in some. The foot and her extremely fair skin, which was appreciably burned were insufficient excuse for copping out. Almost everyone wanted in the van and hated whoever gave in. The walk, off the river, but on a road, and hot, was a purposeless bore. Too, granola and jerky were losing their appeal.

So the ranch was a fine distraction. A pack of dogs bluffed protection. Very ripe tangerines, oranges, even grapefruit rested in thither arboreal crannies that the pickers had missed, and were sweet, if dry. Farm machinery awaited the younger males' fantasies. There was plenty of water and shade.

The discontent still smoldered below the surface.

No one could guess how to get the water up into the tree rows, and only the instructors wanted to, anyway. When the grower rattled in on his truck, though, he explained the system. A valve admits water to one row at a time, which fills in about forty-five minutes. When the water reaches the far end, it is shut off. It was simple enough to seem a disgrace to students who felt man needed to earn his livelihood.

But their disappointment dissolved to learn that ants, dogs, vegetation, rain, and chemical whim caused the water frequently to dissolve a path through the border, when it would rapidly cut a huge break, and all the water would slake the weeds' thirst between the rows of trees. Three men with shovels darting, hacking, throwing, packing could contain the flow well enough, or one big shovel and five or six camp shovels. But there was no pause. No way to survive, most concluded. Especially where a crop might net under $100 a year, and frost could easily drop that into the negative numbers.

There was an impromptu lesson on stars and constellations that night, and it seemed a good night.

The van brought candy bars for a morning mid-trek pick-me-up. Some were eaten upon distribution, most packed. In the morning, some of those packed had been stolen. The anger was mild enough and brief.

Cross-country was the shortest, most interesting way back to the road. Compeau drove and met them at an intersection with water. From the elevated junction, he said they looked very beautiful walking across the land. It was very hot, early, but walking on the highway was more a discomfort than a challenge. The cross-country stretch had been good, so it was decided to leave the road for the day.

For several miles, walking was fun despite the rising temperature. The first canyon was a stimulating change. By the third or fourth such climbing crossing, down one side, across, up the other, blisters and muscles protested strongly, and it seemed most progress was vertical. Despite the together theme, Eric said, "I'm gettin' out of here," and before Dave could formulate an argument, had struck west for the road with about half the group following.

It was a long, hard, serious day for everyone, but much more so for those who stayed off-road. All covered eleven miles, all arrived at the campsite boiling, very thirsty, exhausted, weakly angry. Compeau had been unable to find palatable water. There were several gallons granted by a roadside tavern that at atmospheric temperature tasted like sewage. Bodies staggered in and strewed themselves about while he sped away to get a 12-ounce can of juice for each hiker. The

stragglers got theirs on the road and needed it.

Jeannette, with the sore foot and the tumultuous uterus, had made the off-road trek, crying much of the way, looked terrible from fatigue, discomfort, sun. She rode the last half-mile.

Half a mile of deep gravel and rock separated the road from the riverside clearing where camp would be. The flock groaned and dragged their gear down. It was at least downhill. Recovery was swift in the cool river water. A tired satisfaction lay over the group. Even to step on the eerie, light green, translucent, scorpion that chased barefoot Eric and Dave seemed out of order.

Dinner was a fine change. A wiener, two marshmallows, and eight ounces of Tang around a big fire revived spirits and bodies. There was even candy for a midmorning lift. Intensive and widespread horseplay kept most awake long after bags were spread. No one minded.

The morning granola seemed adequate, but some ate their candy before leaving. Not everyone participated heartily in the group's campaign to clean up all the litter they had found at the site. Perhaps many saw a sufficiently challenging day in the hike. A small, barren mountain waited climbing down the road for those who wished. It may have been real need that caused the theft.

During the cleanup, someone noticed his candy missing. Then, so did others. It wasn't the first instance, so a meeting was called. It went thus:

(1) People bitched, enumerating items missing.

(2) An instructor said, in effect, we're in a frightful shape if *we* can't rely on each other. Experience shows that often group survival depends on trust and spirit and unity, and it shows that that isn't always forthcoming, either. We *need* each other. Not for survival on this trip, but for something just as important.

(3) Another instructor said, "I'm really sick and tired of this crap. I'm just really up to here with it."

(4) A student asked, "But what can we do about it if somebody wants to rip us off? Carry our packs all the goddam time? Sleep with them?"

(5) An instructor said, "We *could* search every pack. That wouldn't be hard."

(6) A hush hit the group.

(7) The same instructor said, "But I don't want to. I want us to care for each other. To hang through it together. To each be tough enough to do all his own part, and maybe *give* a little extra, instead of taking extra. But I'm tired of it, too, and I think if it happens again, we strip down everybody's packs."

(8) Cleanup resumed.

(9) Cleanup ended, packup resumed.

(10) The missing items turned up back where they'd disappeared from.

Jeannette felt terrible and rode with Eric in the van. Seven or eight people chose the mountain. Great, fat iguanas stared at the crew as they neared and passed higher. From the top, the old snake of river lazily led the way south. The climbers photographed it and decided to walk cross-country and cut a curve. They shouted insults at their earthling brothers and began the steep, tricky descent.

The slides show nothing of the stirring beauty some of the climbers described in the string of brightly decked individuals inching down the rock forms. That is regrettable.

Walking off the road was not much easier than the terrain of the previous day. Two boys soon tired badly, and went through brush for the road, the van, the others. They were watched to the van by the rest, who in few more hours also gave it up and followed a thorn-brushy wash to the road. The two boys were there. The other group were about a mile ahead, Eric said.

On the highway, Eddie was extremely hot and tired, breathing and sweating so as to concern David and Compeau. They offered to carry his pack every few minutes; he refused each time. His feet flapped against the ground, and his head wobbled, but he wouldn't take off the pack. "I know one thing," he said. "I'm sure out of shape."

The small group rested occasionally, and Ed went the distance, with pack. The rest of the class had already eaten, swum, rested when they caught up, and were eager to hide the late ones' speed and judgment.

So the late ones hurried to drink, swim, eat, and rest themselves. The river was cold, and no one swam too long. When Eric rolled in, he had oranges, one for everyone, which would have made a festive afternoon, but the flies were hungry, and the ants ubiquitous. Still, it seemed that the complaint rose faster and higher than the bugs could generate. Two cloying drunks in a chopped-up, old, red Falcon, its side labelled *River Patrol* in uneven, silver spray letters, must have accounted for some of the feeling. But timing, for one thing, suggested that the unease had its own fuel.

Groups of three, four, five kids clumped up around, talked, dissolved, formed.

"Let's get out of here."

"Yeah!"

"Where to?"

"*Anyplace* but this!"

"Look. This is the place that Eric scouted out. There isn't anyplace else anywhere near."

"We can walk."

"What's wrong with here?"

"All these damn *bugs*!"

"Yeah. God, they're merciless."

"You'll survive. We're almost there."

"Probably the flies'll go down at dusk."

"And the mosquitoes up. Forget it. Let's split."

"Look. You guys . . . It's not *that* bad . . . It's the only place around. Eric looked."

"I'm sick of this, David. You guys are making too many decisions for us."

"Too many . . . like what? Like what decisions?"

"You're just making all the decisions. All of them."

"Tell me one, then. Tell me a decision I made that should have been different, or made by somebody else, or whatever. Tell me one."

"Oh, forget it!"

"No. Tell me what you're talking about. I don't think there are any. I think its just a bluff. Just general bitching that there's nothing to back up. I want to know if there's some real decision you're complaining about. Now will you just tell me one, please?"

"Oh, forget it. Forget it. Forget you, David."

The meeting was called as the river patrol roared by. Something about the place rubbed everyone the wrong way. If it meant terminating the trip, almost everyone preferred that to staying there. The argument see-sawed, and it was from staff to students. A compromise was reached.

All students and Eric and Dave would walk south down the highway, for the radio tower mountains. Compeau would hasten to Mayflower Park in Blythe, the journey's end point, to arrange accommodations. That done, he would drive back to the mountains and pick up the first group that had arrived and one instructor, take them to the park, and head back for another load. Everyone who wanted to would ride back in the morning to tramp the last thirteen miles so they could say they had made it, or to climb the tower mountains, or both. Those who chose could stay at the park and rest, swim, or fish, call it a trip.

A logical solution, and entirely to the students' satisfaction. "Isn't this supposed to be an alternative school, and we don't all have to do the same thing all the time?" The instructors were distressed, though, that some of the kids, if not all, would be walking some of the way at night. And there certainly weren't sidewalks. Curiously,

higher in mind than the danger to children was the danger to educational reform.

The park manager was very understanding about the situation and very firm about the park rules. Compeau hurried back, and eight students had made or almost made the mountains already. Linda was among them. She said she understood Dave's agitation. He was deeply disappointed at the obvious and prominent flaws in the "class." The fact that they had broken entirely new ground, desperately important ground for the school, and perhaps for public education, hadn't come to him yet. That the next such class would run 200 percent more smoothly and efficiently, he didn't realize. That the kids were fatigued and very hungry, he overlooked. The rebellion, the near mutiny ("I swear to God, Compeau, we were taking off if he made us stay there. We *almost* went *without* any meeting."), its reception, and the compromise were only typical—indeed symbolic—of the school. All that escaped his naturally very personal responses to the moment. Linda said that they would get together and talk. When Compeau remarked to the others that they had done the right thing, they cheered themselves.

At the park there were no bugs, and spirits were very high. Even after all the play, bodies went touring the other sleeping bags to say goodnight or pat a back.

"I swear to God, I don't give a shit how many night roads we have to walk, we're gonna change it. We're gonna govern ourselves. If we hafta get killed. Were those *trucks* scary? But its the only way we can learn. The only way we can *live*."

Few bused up to the tower mountains to climb or walk, perhaps ten. Of those, the closest, Victor, came within two miles of the park. None minded a whit. They had reached their goals, democracy and understanding.

The understanding got another boost at dinner, one and one-fifth pieces of bread and seventeen beans, plus all the dry oatmeal you could eat. Few ate much. Hunger stretched tempers, but they were tougher stuff now, and some strong, strange, new spirit united them.

That spirit, and food, were the subjects of the little talk there was on the way back.

At school, a town meeting was in session. The place had been chaotic with half its kids and half its teachers gone. On Wednesday, the superintendent had visited. He wasn't happy. But Greta has a lot of grace. Before she got into that, she welcomed back the river group. There was a lot of cheering and hugging and laughing. She asked people to tell the group what they had learned. They looked at each other and blew out some breath, then they looked into space. Then they looked again, and sang, "I'm a beaver, you're a beaver,

we are beavers all, and when we get together. . . ."

The students, perhaps most of all, find it hard to verbalize much of what they learn.

12

MY DADDY HAS A DADDY: EVALUATION IN THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

When Greta Pruitt is asked what kind of learning is going on in the alternative school, she sometimes relates a simple observation she made one day. She noticed a small group of five- and six-year-olds standing together. Brad was saying, "My daddy is thirty-four years old. And my daddy has a daddy, and my daddy's daddy is *fifty-five years old!*"

"Wow!" exclaimed his pint-sized colleagues. Brad went on, "And you know what else? I also have a grandmother, 'cept they call her a great-grandmother. And she is eighty-four years old!" The group was awed.

A simple incident that probably could and probably does happen anywhere. And yet Greta thinks the incident is especially important. Why? She asks if we have ever had to explain to a group of very young children that the man that is sometimes seen with their teacher is not really her daddy, but her husband. "Have you ever had to explain the concepts of age and size and family relationships to a group of kindergarteners?" "Here it was," Greta stresses, "all going on in a mini-lesson with a captive audience, taught not by a certified teacher, or textbook, or a lesson planned for Cuisenaire rods, but taught by a five-year-old boy!"

But doesn't that happen everywhere? Well, certainly it does, but in the alternative school it is forced to happen—again and again and again. The school has restructured itself so that a schedule will not

obstruct learning, so that tests and record keeping will not proscribe learning, so that the learning happens as a natural process.

One day Kelly ran into Greta's office and saw the newly built geodesic dome standing in the courtyard. "Look at the dome," she said. "I think I want to go out and look at the dome some more." And Kelly skipped out of the office to go outside. Greta reminds us that in most schools unless a bell had rung for recess, Kelly would not have had the opportunity to "look at the dome some more."

Once as I was talking to Greta in the office, a boy and a girl, one of high school age and the other probably eight or nine, came in and sat under a table in the corner of the room. As we talked, I noticed they took a dictionary from the shelf, looked at a few words together, wrote something on a paper they had brought along, put the dictionary back, and left. All this was done so quietly and so naturally that I had to tell Greta what had occurred. She had not been aware of the incident, it was so much a part of regular school routine.

By 1972, Robin was a school tragedy. She had been kicked around school for eight and one-half years. A charter member of the alternative school, she was a constant reminder of all our failures. She was fourteen, poorly dressed, uncontrollably agressive, extremely loud, constantly profane, unmotivated, and for the most part uninvolved.

A year later, I walked into the large alternative school music room and found Robin playing the piano for a group of students. Later in discussion, I was overwhelmed by her poise, her positive attitude and her attractiveness. She said, "Because of the alternative school I look forward to each morning. I love to come to school." When I asked how long she had been playing piano, she answered, "Just this year. We don't have a piano at home, so this is the only place I can play." Robin took an opportunity presented by the alternative school, and through self-discipline became not only a pianist but a productive and proud citizen.

Greg, ten years old, poor, a youngster with a learning disability, off the low end of the chart in reading, took a trip to the courts one day with a small group to watch the Daniel Ellsberg proceedings. From that day on, Greg regularly stopped in at the office each morning and asked Greta for her newspaper so that he could read about the progress of the Ellsberg trial.

Talking with a group of students, I asked Ken how he became involved in a network TV production. Ken replied that he was chosen because he had learned to operate the porta-pack equipment they had in the school. He then made a rather unusual offer. Ken asked the other students if they were interested in learning television camera

technique. When they answered yes, Ken said, "Well, see me later about arranging some time, but remember this isn't any hour and a half game—this is complicated stuff." Ken was thirteen.

Greta stresses the importance of student decision making; not only the opportunity to make decisions but to be confronted by their consequences. Twenty-three students, twelve years old and up, had planned to take the eight-day Colorado River trip. One of their tasks was to earn enough money to go. They did it by doing yard work, washing cars, and whatever, all part of the school program. Or, rather, they almost did it, for a week before departure they were still $100 short. Entering the office one day a couple of the students said, "Hey, Greta," (they do call her Greta, but, as she says, "that's a lot better than some things principals are called") "can the School loan us $100?" Greta answered, "No way. I got permission from the district for you to take the trip, but we don't have a hundred dollars, and even if we did, I wouldn't give it to you." She told the staff not to lend the campers any money. The youngsters worked for the remainder of the week, but they took off still a little short. They lived and hiked on the desert for eight days. A rationing system of granola, peanut butter, honey, and crackers was in effect throughout the trip. The entire group will not forget the survival lessons learned on the Colorado River. When I asked several students what they learned on the trip, one replied, "We learned how to survive and how to get along with each other. We were much closer than in a school; we were all together. We camped out every night and stayed up late talking about each other and our interests. We really got to know each other. Sure, some people had arguments, but so do families."

These incidents are little more than memories. They are not recorded in record cards. They receive no grades. They are for the most part unaccountable in traditional terms. This is one of the great dilemmas of this particular kind of schooling. New systems of accountability need to be designed because of the emphasis placed on informal serendipitous learning. And this exposes an even greater issue. What is the purpose of evaluation?

It seems at times that our educational system is more concerned with record keeping than it is with learning. We keep looking for proof of how students are doing, how they measure up to others. Do they add, conjugate, comprehend, make decisions, get along? It is not enough that they are doing these things; we must prove they are. We must produce evidence. Even if we build a totality, a habitat, which is a life experience, we must, because of conventional reasons, break it down into spelling, reading, computation, etc.—something that can be recorded. Why? What are those basic skills for? Other

courses? It is interesting how much more creditable the Colorado River trip was with many people because students were asked to write compositions about it. Is the total experience not more important? Are not the reportable aspects a miniscule corner of necessary experience—learning? If a student can understand and appreciate the operation of an automobile, the need for anti-pollution devices, the purpose of societal laws, the poetry of the mountains, or the jackhammer from first-hand experience, need he spell his learning out in equations or parts of speech?

Of course, the student experience must go beyond exposure, there must also be competence. The question then becomes, how do we know there is competence? One way is through discussion such as has been described. It is interesting how much of this discussion in the alternative school takes place in the office. The office is the action center. It is the arena for personal problems, for private reading, for group demands, for demonstrations of affection, and for knife fights. Whatever is going on in the school seems to be in the office.

Another, perhaps more satisfying, form of accountability is actual performance. But here we are talking about performance in real contexts, not simulated or fragmented testing: the ten year old reading about Ellsberg; the girl playing piano; the boy operating TV equipment; the social experiment on the desert. These are situations that demand performance, the most obvious and the most valid indication of learning. One junior high boy commented that before school began he knew nothing about cars, but after taking auto mechanics for a year, he was doing brake jobs for the teachers, and, as he said, "When teachers let you work on their cars, they really have to trust you!" His father told me later, "I was amazed when my son tuned the family car and corrected some operating deficiencies." Now that is a command performance of learning!

There is another world, however, and that is the world of schooling. That world calls for a different kind of evaluation. For the most part, the word "evaluation" is used loosely in schools. Ideally, evaluation is a process designed to improve performance and the decision-making system. The word takes on different meaning in schools, however. There it stands for the reward and punishment system; it is a recommended means for "motivation" (threat); it is a system where someone must gain at someone else's expense or loss.

Deep in the substructure of the educational worship of evaluation is a devotion to two principles: "equal treatment for all," and "preparation for the bumpy road of life." I would contend that both of these sacred beliefs are subversive pillars of our elitist and racist educational

system. Equal treatment for all is manifest in our grading system. We give all students an exam on the same material and then assign grades on the basis of the answers given. What could be fairer! What if we took 100 patients with assorted ailments from a hospital clinic and gave each person two aspirins. Some with pain might be relieved, some with illness might be aggravated, probably most would be unaffected. If we were then to assign grades on the basis of symptomatic condition, those who were healthy would get A, those who were slightly ill would get B, those who were uncomfortable would receive C, the failing would receive D, and the dying would be marked F. The winners remain winners, the losers remain losers. We give equal tests, equal homework, equal writing and reading assignments, and we expect equal behavior and equal results. We give and expect equally whether the students are very healthy or very ill, disregarding the fact that many of those students have been very, very ill for generations. The system is designed to reward the elite and to oppress the oppressed.

We persist in oppressing by arguing that there should be tests, there should be grades, and there should be failures because life is full of regulations and disappointments. Again, what we are saying is that some must fail—the losers—and they had better know early that they are failures. This argument for fair and realistic treatment could be another way of saying life will be structured our way with our tests and our grading systems recognizing the "goody-good kids" and reminding the niggers of the world—whether they be agressive Afros or lazy longhairs—that they had better stay underfoot where they belong. It has always amazed me that the adults who most often say life shouldn't be handed to kids on a silver platter are most often the parents who are handing life on a silver platter to their own children.

What is usually meant in education by the word "evaluation" is systemized reporting, authority, and accountability. There is really nothing wrong with reporting, authority, and accountability though the means, of course, are often questionable. We should insist on a distinction between the shades of meaning—reporting, authority, accountability, decision making, performance, reward and punishment, and communication—that the word evaluation implies.

I am convinced that 90 percent of school evaluation efforts are for purposes of reporting. People want to know what is going on. Out of that desire, a noble mythology has been created in schools. Tests, grades, basic skills, remedial classes, honor rolls, prerequisites, credentials, report cards, exams, reports, and segregation of students by "acceptability" are parts of the honored legend of schooling today. The noble conspiracy has captured the hearts of students, parents,

teachers, and administrators, and it has been challenged only weakly by occasional philosophers and free schools who have found the defenses practically impregnable. Evaluation, not learning, is the sanctified goal of schooling. Evaluation provides teachers with jobs and mindless administrators with purpose. Record keeping, accountability, evaluation—whatever you call it—is both the process and the content of schooling today.

It is a cancer that thwarts most experimental efforts. It has a parasitic hold on the curriculum and the economics of schooling—so much so that many social critics are arguing that the only way to cure the disease is to kill the patient, to do away with the institution of schooling as we know it.

We do not agree with the advocates of deschooling, but we do believe radical changes must occur through comprehensive examination (evaluation) of what exists. Alternative schools should be designed to give public education that opportunity with minimal risk. It has been found in many alternative schools that the greatest difficulty—whether it be between the system and the school, the student and the teacher, or particularly the teacher and the teacher—lies in that single broad issue, evaluation. In Pasadena, some aspects of that issue were obvious at the beginning, and some others became more apparent in time. By looking at some of the problems and their attempted solutions, we will develop a less rhetorical perspective on the role of evaluation in the public alternative school.

Students

We have discussed student learning and evaluation at length in Chapter 5. There we emphasized the multiple dimensions of student learning brought out by the alternative school. Within that broad context, several specific problems should be added.

In the planning school and early in the alternative school, the staff made every attempt to avoid the traditional trappings of schooling. We thus had no tolerance for tests, grades, homework, schedules, attendance requirements, and record keeping. Our search to do everything in a new way became time-consuming and extremely frustrating. And even if we did find a solution, it often was not very satisfactory for the outside world.

We soon decided that being against tests was like being against hammers. When hammers are used to drive nails, they can be very useful. When they are used to bash heads, they are dangerous. The

purpose and process, not the instrument, are really the determining factors. If screws are used instead of nails, therefore, a hammer will not be an effective instrument, but when a nail is used, it is silly to go out in search of flat rocks and blunt instruments when a supply of hammers is at hand.

The alternative school now uses a battery of tests to assess aptitude and achievement in cognitive and affective areas. In addition to these instruments, parent, student, and visitor comments are frequently collected to supplement teacher diagnoses.

A modular credit system has finally been accepted whereby students are given a negotiated amount of modular credits for each learning experience. Modular credit and testing were introduced to meet a need for hard data about what students were learning. Data has been thus generated without detriment to the school or students. Other record-keeping systems—daily journals, term reports, students contracts—have not been very successful.

Small advisory groups—support groups—popular in many alternative schools have not worked well yet in Pasadena. Most guidance and supervision have been provided through regular classes and extemporaneous events or discussions rather than a separate advising system. Periodic staff meetings devoted solely to individual student progress have been useful both for the development of student programs and the development of staff unity and communication.

Staff

Staff evaluation remains the single most difficult problem of the alternative school. Younger staff particularly were unwilling to accept responsibilities that they perceived to be administrative in nature. They thus avoided testing and record keeping, supervision, group advising, and accountability for student achievement. On the other hand, they insisted on full decision-making and teaching responsibility and rejection of system-wide regulations, conventions, and requirements. These particular staff members were from the University of Massachusetts and, thus, had little formal allegiance to the Pasadena Unified School District—its administrators, its schools, its teachers, and its students. Only two methods of combating this situation were even slightly successful. The first was some needed role definition and distinction, and the second was additional support from and accountability to the university.

It seemed as though the effort to make one school, the alternative

school, different and better heightened the sense of cynicism and antagonism and lowered the spirit of mutual support and cooperation. The staff waited like vultures to attack policies, decisions, and actions rather than risk positive effort to build and improve. This was as evident in internal relationships as it was externally. The frustration of this situation is reminiscent of a scene in the movie, *The Wild One*, in which motorcycle king Marlon Brando is asked by an annoyed adult, "What are you rebelling against?" To which Brando shrugged and mumbled, "What ya got?"

Considerable effort was made to create a staff development program, even to the extent of hiring, on retainer, a management consultant and introducing a teacher improvement clinic. Staff improvement through evaluation, however, remains the number one problem of the alternative school in Pasadena.

The picture has become considerably brighter with a restructured organizational pattern and revised teacher selection. The reorganization calls for far less dependency on university interns, greater teacher supervision of unexperienced staff, and a clearer definition of goals and strategies for the school. Of even greater importance is the continued refinement of the teacher selection process.

Knowledge about the needs of the school and the qualities of appropriate potential teachers has grown steadily. Four characteristics have become particularly critical as indicators of potential teaching success in the alternative school. They are a devotion to working with ethnic diversity; a unique competence and conviction about one or more fields of interest; a sense of humor; and a willingness to work unusually long hours—often twelve or fourteen hours a day, overnight camping trips, evening meetings, and weekend picnics or trips.

To ascertain these qualities, a team of parents comprised of representatives of each racial group in the school screen and select all teaching candidates. Assisting them are the director, some veteran teachers, and several students. It is not enough to talk about racial tolerance, it must be examined closely through the eyes of black, Asian, and Chicano people who are entrusting their children to the hands and prejudices of the teaching profession. Although the alternative school has selected a staff that is 50 percent minority in a community which is 50 percent minority, it is not the percentages that are significant. The school is not content merely with the minority representation. More important is a selection process that has subjected 100 percent of the teaching staff to scrutiny by a multiracial committee dedicated to finding a professional team rich in talent, warmth, diversity, and respect for mankind.

Despite the constant questioning by insiders and outsiders about what was going on in the planning school, it took more than eight weeks for us to agree to posting a schedule of classes and special events. So great was our antipathy towards schedules and blocks of time that we expected that the school could operate and be understood more or less by accident. It probably took another ten weeks of schooling before the schedule was functioning with reasonable maintenance. Now a visitor to the alternative school is immediately faced with a board eight feet long and eight feet wide listing the classes for the current five-week period. For one period the board listed:

Learning to Live
Creative Dramatics
Algebra
Multi Center
Math Lab
Psychology—Child and Adolescent Study Surveys, Experiments and Mazes, Behavior Mod
Integrated Day
Physiology
Hip Lit
Music Lab
Order Films
Athletics! Through the Eyes of a Jockque
Ice
Get in Shape
We
Creative Writing
Sewing and Needlecraft
High School English and Literature
Sports—Basketball and Volleyball
Cooking
Rapping on the Grass
Exercizes and Awareness
Science
One-Shot Mini Course
Geometry Part 3—Dome Building
Outdoor Adventures—How to Survive in the City by Getting Out of It
Recorder Band
Vocations
Fabrication and Repairs
Physical Education
Drawing and Painting
Ceramics
Marine Biology and Pond Life
Singing Lab
Occult Science
Anthropology
Ethnic Studies
Electronic Music
Comparative Religions
Motion
Ecology Exercizes
Group Singing
Wrestling
Lunch and Music
Swimming
Self-Defense
Expression of Self Through Art

In addition to these offerings were a mobile total experience for a

dozen students called The Little Red Schoolhouse. Numerous special events are also listed—guests, parents, school visits, etc. One-fifth of the student experience is devoted to trips and social service. Informal spontaneous events and tutoring are frequent. This is an example of the curriculum offered to 150 students aged K-12 for a five-week period.

The five-week term idea was used mostly to structure continued re-creation of the curriculum. Each term is followed by a one-week evaluation period during which teachers review and revise the program, district testing is done, parent-teacher conferences are scheduled, supplies and equipment are scrounged and prepared for the next five-week term, and staff meetings of teachers and students are held to assess everything that has been going on in school.

In addition to soliciting information from teachers and students about the curriculum in regular meetings and as daily operational procedures in and out of classes, further comments are provided by parents and visitors. Each visitor to the school is required to complete a questionnaire about what he saw and felt, and parents at various times during the year submit opinions in writing about the school. Data provided through these sources have been useful and usually very supportive.

Impact

The school makes several attempts to describe itself to and hopefully to influence the "establishment." Town meetings are held every other week to discuss the school program with parents. This procedure started as the school began, and parent attendance continues to be very high. One reason for the lack of apathy is the extent to which parents are called upon for advice and assistance in the operation of the school. Several parent dinners are held each year, and a number of committees, some standing and some ad hoc, keep parent-school communication channels very active.

Two major concerns of the district about the alternative school have been teacher reaction to it and cost. During the 1972-73 school year, the Pasadena Education Association made a comprehensive study of the school. In a fifty-page report released locally and to the state education association, the study group wrote:

> It is recommended that the Alternative School continue to operate within the framework of its present philosophy . . . and . . . that optional alternative schools . . . be designed through the joint efforts of parents, students and

educators in view of needs determined by the parents' and students' value systems.

Frank Welch, Pasadena Area Director of Special Schools and Programs, developed a summary of expenses and showed that the alternative school operated on about the same budget (slightly less) per pupil as other schools in the district. Thus, two significant issues were authoritatively evaluated.

To foster interaction between Pasadena schools, two specific devices were initiated by the alternative school; the formation of a mini-league of three Pasadena cooperating schools and the sponsoring of a teacher inservice course for the district entitled Alternatives in Education. This course featured innovative programs throughout the district and elsewhere.

To publicize and explain the school, a report in two parts was printed called "A Learning Community." The first part described the history of the school and briefly described its unique characteristics listed as: extreme diversity; selection by choice; replicable cost; flexible staff organization; alternative learning experiences; K-12 enrollment; humane environment; accountability for learning; a mandate to change education. Part two of the booklet described the evaluation design including six instruments to test cognitive areas and ten instruments to test affective areas. Also included were fourteen goals of the program, a parent survey done by parents, and a collection of pertinent information such as enrollment breakdown, staffing pattern, budget, curriculum, questionnaire results, special events, and consultants used.

Finally, every effort was made to communicate all events, positive and negative, to Superintendent Ray Cortines. To this end, memos were sent to the superintendent's office on a regular schedule. Director Greta Pruitt regularly attends administrator meetings; her salary is at the regular principal scale. The school thus attempts to provide alternative education for students through very routine, unexceptional administrative procedure.

Thus, the school continues to be open to the many dimensions of evaluation—student achievement, record keeping, district impact, accountability, decision making, curriculum adjustment, communication, public relations, staff development, and so on. It uses routine evaluation methods when appropriate and makes up specialized procedures to meet its differences.

I found one such special procedure one night last spring. The school had just completed a long evening of entertainment for 250 guests from southwestern United States. Ray Cortines and I remained until

all had gone home. Greta and a few parents were cleaning up for the next day, and I spotted Robin, the metamorphic pianist, lingering in the school she hated to leave. I asked her if she would like to play for the superintendent. She politely agreed, and Ray and Robin and I went into the large music room. As the lights were going off elsewhere in the building, we were alone. Ray lay on his stomach on a conveniently placed couch, Robin slowly played a haunting, self-composed piece that seemed to have no end, and I thought back over the past twelve months.

I thought of a school that struggled to be a school. I thought of a youngster who made life as difficult for us as we made it for her, and I thought of a superintendent who one year earlier as assistant superintendent had vehemently recommended the closing of this school because it catered to an elite population and because children were not learning as they could in regular schools. And now as Robin was singled out from 40,000 students in the district to play for this unique audience, I thought, "God, there's more than one way to evaluate learning!" And at that moment we all felt great, great hope for the future of education.

13

HERE TODAY, THEY'RE TOMORROW

To those of us who fought through the anguish of political maneuvering and educational floundering, it is almost incredible that now through the settling dirt there stands in Pasadena a real live alternative school. It grew rapidly from a dream planted in a Vermont conference, to the roots of an enthused community, to the shaky seedling of a planning school, to the growing stem and bud of the 1972–73 alternative school, to the blossom burst of a 300-student school in 1973–74, and then to the permanent plant housing over 600 students in 1974–75. And now we begin to ask, "Will the bloom wilt? What will happen when the halo of excitement fades into the energy of other new growths in some separate garden?"

The Movement Revisited

There is little immediate reason to believe that the present program cannot be sustained. The alternative school movement is on the rise everywhere. In 1973, at least 300 schools within the public school system had voluntary enrollment. In 1974, the first international conference on alternative schooling was held. Educators with experience in alternative schools (such as Dwight Allen, John Bremer, Ray Cortines, Mario Fantini, and Vernon Smith) are being asked by groups throughout the country to speak about alternative schools. Anyone else with experience or interest can keep a schedule filled just by appearing at workshops and conferences focusing on the same theme.

The mood of the country may be represented by a piece of legislation

proposed in California, AB488. This bill promoting the establishment of alternative schools was passed by both houses but returned by Governor Reagan on December 29, 1972. This unique bill, which was reintroduced and probably will be passed during the 1974 session is significant in its far-reaching implications.

The alternative school in Pasadena coexists with high school and junior high continuation schools and an afternoon evening school, which actually began prior to the planning school. Attendance at each of these schools consists at least partly of volunteer applicants. Thus, the concept of alternative schooling is firmly established and accepted by the district and the community.

Possibly the most dramatic event involving the alternative education in Pasadena began to unfold in May, 1973. Three liberal members of the five-member board of education including its last two presidents had been decisively replaced in a bitter 1973 election. The three newcomers had run on a platform of eliminating busing experimentation and permissiveness in Pasadena schools. In May, the board members-elect unraveled their plan for new alternative schools. This school, called the Fundamental School, was established to teach reading, writing, arithmetic, respect, and patriotism to selected children in Pasadena. Promotion depends on achievement test scores, and discipline is controlled by corporal punishment. In one year, the superintendent, the board of education, and the notion of the alternative school had turned through 180°.

And yet the alternative school, the antithesis of everything the new board members stood for, was clearly being used as a model—cost, election, governance, planning, etc.—for a new school to meet the needs of a newly recognized constituency. At this point, I know of nowhere else in the world where two public schools offer two opposing philosophies and methods of teaching to the same community *on a voluntary basis.* It will not be the first time that America has opened fresh horizons and improved standards through the strange and accidental result of political combat, local need, and a struggle for individualism. In Pasadena, as in the nation, it seems as though the bloom is not wilting. Rather, new shoots are growing, and new seeds are falling to create many gardens both beautiful and perennial in their diversity.

Teachers

The "community of learning" so often stressed in this book influences our future version of the teaching profession. In Pasadena,

we have demonstrated that education is a broad concern in which professionals play an important part as managers and as teachers. In reshaping schooling, however, we have learned that many people do not see school (or life, for that matter) as teachers do. For the most part, teachers have been successful in the system, they are liberal, they are middle class, they generally trust the institution of schooling and see little reason not to perpetuate it. They are, after all, teachers. With the inclusion of parents, and other citizens, and greater student responsibility, new perspectives are released. The profession of education must redefine its own role and envision new ways to identify its own perspectives by recognizing the contribution of the community in its broadest sense.

The effect of the participation by the University of Massachusetts has been substantial both for the school and for the university. For the school, the university has provided leverage to get outside of its own system. A kind of glamor and cosmopolitan dynamic has been offered through the school of education. The university has helped to work out evaluation procedures, staff training procedures, and planning assistance. As an outside influence, it has often succeeded at closing potential gaps at various interfaces—principal and staff, school and district, district and community, teacher and student.

Particularly significant has been the university role in improving relationships between teachers and students, due to the participation of undergraduate interns, for the most part. These young people have brought an affection for students, an understanding of contemporary values, a naturalness in behavior, and an extraordinary willingness to "live school" twenty-four hours a day. If we can learn as educators to balance the contributions of interns with their sometimes limited teaching ability, erratic judgment, and general distrust of authority, our ability to include the limitless army of post-high school people in public school teaching will create enormous potential for meaningful pedagogical change.

On the other hand, the lessons learned in the alternative school have significantly influenced the university. We have reinforced our conviction that there must be greater differentiation of roles in the teaching profession. There are innumerable sources of inspiration and knowledge for school-age children. The major obstacle to tapping those resources is our absurd assumption that once admitted to the profession, all teachers must do the same thing and all must receive the same compensation.

We have also learned that different teachers belong in different schools. The idea of *a* teacher preparation program or *a* teacher certification is archaic and detrimental to our future. The alternative

school has shown us a willing group of individuals outside of those professionally trained who must be considered an important part of our future school faculties. Thus, the alternative school experience has supported the present direction of many universities to change their teacher training efforts, to offer alternative routes to certification including a variety of apprentice positions, to help individuals prepare for a variety of teaching situations, and to include in new training programs a variety of people who normally fall outside of the normal campus-based cadre of teacher candidates.

We have also learned from a research standpoint that university rhetoric about education and innovation is often accusatory in nature. It is often confusing because of the high value it places on technical language. It is often not presented on a useful or timely level for a school staff in the midst of day-by-day operation. It has been my personal experience that much of this university "research" and consultant rhetoric, including much that I personally contributed, is created for its own sake as part of a higher education mystique, and has only minimal value outside of image building and public relations. We must acquire a sophistication in the university to shape our potentially valuable theoretical findings to appropriate and useful advice through more frequent and more intimate involvement in the day-by-day operation of elementary and secondary schools. It is this combined effort, this honest and status-free liaison, that I believe holds the highest future hope for education. It is a relationship in which no university or school system has done more than scratch an occasional itch, and unfortunately those scratches at present have been self-serving rather than comforting the bites and annoyances of a prospective partner.

And finally, we must seek out and encourage the Compeaus of the world, those teachers or potential teachers who have been "messed over" by the system and who because of their antagonism toward the establishment have a mission for mankind that for the sake of mankind must be fulfilled. The teaching profession would do well to condone and support this highly subversive and highly professional attempt to make the Compeaus of today's society the educators of tomorrow's world.

Parents and Students

Probably enough comment has been made about parental participation and influence in the alternative school and about how that contribution might influence the future of schooling. Parents have

been involved to the extent of their capability and desire to be involved. Greta calls the parent governance structure an "adhocracy." Open meetings have encouraged free and regular exchange of opinion between staff, students, and parents. The following comments of parents solicited by parents best reveal their aspirations regarding "their" school. We think it is noteworthy that the alternative school community becomes stronger because each member of that community—student, teacher, parent—is to some extent held responsible for its welfare. In how many schools today are parents asked to assess their school and their children's progress in that school?

We think it appropriate to end this book with comments written by parents about their feelings and their children in the Pasadena Alternative School.

About Participation

We feel that our roles at school are very essential. We have been allowed to participate in many activities from teaching on a regular basis to cleaning and moving furniture. We feel that we have had a voice in decisions and that the staff has always taken our views into consideration.

I think many parents support the Alternative School and would want their child to attend. Its positive values include the production of better citizens for the community.

I love the atmosphere and openness. I feel I can talk to the teachers and staff and really have something to say about how the school is conducted.

About the Philosophy

The ability of the school to relate to the needs of each individual is its greatest asset. It doesn't try to fit all students into a preconceived mold as the traditional schools do.

The school lets children learn at their own rate of speed. There is no pushing, and unlike his previous school, staff members don't say he isn't working up to his potential or that he's immature.

The Alternative School provides an environment which permits him to expand his own individuality.

A family feeling, the staff not only tolerates children but loves them.

She is not limited by the concept of "what a 5 year old is *supposed* to do."

(My 10 year old) has leadership potential which the Alternative School gives him the opportunity to develop. I am pleased with the fact that he has freedom to move around, as his rapid physical growth demands.

The freedom of the school makes it possible for him to see other youngsters pursue a variety of activities, and it enriches his experience to know that these things are possible even though he does not participate in all of them.

I feel the Alternative School has given our son a rare opportunity to have certain practical educational experiences that are very beneficial to him at a time in his educational career where he needed to be "free to learn" after a few years of feeling "stifled" in many classes.

The Alternative School gives our son a chance to flourish on his own without being held back. It has greater flexibility. Our son has enjoyed especially being able to pursue what *he* thinks he needs to know.

Our son is a bright boy who was not getting enough out of regular school last year. He feels like he belongs in the Alternative School. He especially appreciates the varied program.

Our 12 year old son has, since beginning the Alternative School been "stretching muscles he didn't even know he had." He has taken part in such diverse activities as filming a television show, fixing automobiles, reading every science-fiction book in sight, and organizing a student group.

We believe that involvement in such activities in the independent manner fostered in the Alternative School has succeeded in relating education and information to the world as our son sees it. It has definitely helped him to see how his own actions and inactions shape his life.

He is noticeably more confident and eager to experiment. He is more aware of people as individuals rather than as stereotypes.

He is also beginning to reestablish his studies of the traditional subjects, especially where he has seen their presence in reality.

All this has been possible because he has, in the Alternative School, been permitted the flexibility of selecting the personalities among the staff and students whom he most admires, and he has had the freedom to follow them. At the same time, some turn to him for leadership in other activities.

He loves the school. We are enthusiastically and proudly following its growth and development.

The Alternative School must continue. C.'s learning facility and habits have improved 100 percent. She is very happy and discusses school at home often. I would like my other children to attend as well. It appears to me that 90 percent of the students are happy and doing well—something much superior to other public schools.

Parents of G. (13 years old) are positively 100 percent behind the school and its philosophy. Their daughter's attitudes toward school have really changed. Now she is anxious to go, and really enjoys and looks forward to it. She has taken the initiative to study and learn. She has done more reading and studying (particularly at home) than she had done all last year; reading a book or more a week at home.

About Staff

We are highly impressed with the staff who try very hard and are constantly re-evaluating themselves.

Greta is a great woman and has done wonderful things.

The staff is marvelous. Teachers are very versatile. In addition to their own skills they have the ability to help the children find information from other sources.

He has mentioned at various times that he felt he got more out of "15 minutes with Compeau" discussing Physics informally than out of several physics classes.

His rapport with teachers and interns is very good. I value particularly the willingness of the staff to accept him as he is, contrasting that with the evaluation of him in a conventional classroom, where people

often said he was an "A" student, but not working up to his potential.

For the first time my ideas concerning my daughter's needs have been expressed and there has been complete communication with the teacher. The teacher really knows my child, as never before in other schools. Learning style is very important. Other teachers were tied to the curriculum, and molded J. to it. The reverse occurs at the Alternative School.

We appreciate very much Greta's deep knowledge of and compassion for each of the children participating in the school. N. went along on the overnight trip in October, but unaccountably found herself stricken with homesickness. Greta's response was reassuring to N., and we were grateful for her concern.

B., 15, has benefited most at the Alternative School from her relationships with staff members, including Mrs. Pruitt and all of the other teachers and interns she's been in contact with. Her self-awareness is keener; her self-concept is broader; she's more aware of her strengths and weaknesses.

About Relationships

Our daughter likes the relaxed atmosphere, and personal relationships. She is working closely with people.

N. is very eager. She is taking a government class with mostly older high school students. They went to a Board of Directors meeting in Pasadena and N. came home and discussed the Council and City politics. She loves to be with older kids and is not intimidated by them.

Our two boys used to have problems getting along with other kids. Now they appear to have changed.

I know he values his relationship with members of the staff—as he is judged on his own merits (and shortcomings) as an individual—not merely a student, or "a kid."

And, interestingly, I feel he has developed a rapport with some of the younger children—an age group he had no particular affection for in the past.

Integration is much more successful. Relationships formed are more deeply rooted than in other schools. Parents are treated on a more relaxed level, and our ideas are more accepted.

I have observed in his play at home that his image of Japanese people was stereotyped. He perceived them as short, sinister people with guns, generally agressive and dangerous. The Alternative School has made it possible for him to become friendly with a teenager of Japanese decent. They have a very warm positive relationship, and think highly of each other. He was astonished when I told him she was Japanese. I feel that this was an excellent informal way to teach social sciences, to break down ethnic prejudices.

About Children

Our child will continue at the Alternative School. Every day of school is a happy one for him. There isn't a day that goes by that he doesn't have a meaningful learning experience; for example, learning to throw a pot on the pottery wheel was a tremendous accomplishment for a six year old. Our child is very shy, but his teachers have been able to get some valuable interests out of him and have found ways to heighten his former interests.

Our 9 year old N. loves school very much. She is miserable when she is sick and can't go.

My son's reaction to the school has been nothing but positive. What problems that did arise were worked out by parent, child, and teacher together, efficiently and openly. I was amazed. I would be extremely disappointed if this flow between all three were not able to continue. It has altered his life 100 percent.

D. is involved in a wider variety of activities at the Alternative School. He brings home many ideas, and pursues activities begun at school. Following a terrarium activity at school and a trip to a green house, he has been doing a great deal of planting at home. The school has provided opportunities for woodworking that have been valuable for him, too. The equipment and supervision have met his needs well.

K. did well in regular school but had stomach aches all the time

and showed great anxiety in performing and succeeding. In the Alternative School, she has become more mature and self-sufficient, having a better sense of self-image. She has and enjoys the opportunity to make important decisions.

C. is in kindergarten and elected to stay the entire school day as it is so pleasurable to him. His sibling wants to come to this great school too.

The Alternative School is excellent for my son with regard to social maturity. He is enthusiastic (especially about anything Compeau teaches) and is growing educationally. He is excited about constellations and photography, particularly. He insisted that we come out to see the constellations he studies at school because he was so excited by them.

B. seems to like going to school; a change from immediate past experience. As a result of non-pressure he is doing better and is much happier. He likes to go to the library to get books on varied subjects. His interests are wider. He has developed interests in photography, woodwork, and science projects. He especially enjoys the trips.

K. is happier than ever at the Alternative School, showing great joy when going to school. She is much more confident as a person, as she seems to be valued for herself. Teachers say her work is "at grade level or above" in many things. She has had dyslexia and is now reading at grade level. Parents had been very concerned that reading ability might fall off, but on the contrary, it has actually improved.

During a trip to Occidental College where she saw a dinosaur skeleton, she was "turned on." For the first time the meaning of such exhibits became clear because much time was given to explanation. The family had taken many museum trips without such results. K. wanted to know if she could attend Occidental to study Palentology occasionally, but not exclusively. Other visits to various places have aroused her interest to the point of wishing to partake in that field of activity. This never happened to her before.

I have noticed that he talks at home about what's happening in school considerably more than he used to. I believe that he responds well when his teachers expect a lot of him, in the sense that their course offerings are sufficiently challenging. He has enjoyed a sense of accomplishment from his work in art with a wax process and with

clay; he's found it valuable to have enough time with these activities to get something done. He's also finished a table in the woodshop, and was pleased with that.

We are very fortunate to have two children in the Alternative School. Last year our daughter (8 1/2 years old) missed 41 days of school. She is now delighted to go to school. She is rarely sick and on those occasions is very disappointed to miss school.

She is more open—less shy than she was previously. The school is a very successful experience for her. She reads much and loves her teacher. She is much more independent—goes on overnight trips without requiring her mother along.

Our son (age 6) also loves school and won't miss a day. He plays soccer with children of all ages and is not all intimidated by the older ones.

J. loves to read, is not bored, and loves to go to school. Learning doesn't stop when she comes home. She is more relaxed about the learning experience.

Parents of K. (12) feel very positive about the Alternative School. K. had developed an ulcer in previous school situation. Now, for the first time she enjoys going to school.

L. likes going to school, looks forward to it because there's often something different going on. There are more field trips and films. He was particularly interested in a film about a baby being born.

D. (16) has been really changed by his experience at the Alternative School. In past years he hasn't wanted to go to school, and his attendance record has been poor. This year he likes all of his instructors, and looks forward to going to school. He comes home asking questions about history and math and a variety of other topics to which he's been exposed at school. I see this as a new drive which D. hasn't had before. Much of his energy in past years has gone into challenging the system, which he disliked. Now, instead of trying to outwit or alienate his teachers and counselors, he has a good positive relationship with them. They accept him as an important contributor to the school.

D. has had considerable difficulty in past years with reading. This year he has received special help from Mrs. Peterson, and in exchange he helps her younger students with their reading. For the first time this year he actually finished a book, and went on to read others.

He has also accepted the responsibility for teaching football to the upper elementary age-group at the school.

K. loves going to the Alternative School and actually hated school before. He is interested in science and performing experiments. He is much more sociable since starting the Alternative School and is making more of an effort in most areas (even math). He has enjoyed the trips. Mother feels that the Alternative School deserves all the credit for his improvement and new-found interests.

He seems quieter now than he was previously at school, and is more interested in learning basic skills. He is making progress in reading. He finds academic classes hard work, but enjoys it anyway. He has learned to play drums at school and is doing very well. He's also enjoyed photography, and likes playing football at school.

He relates well to the older children at school, and is pleased by their interest in him. He also enjoys his teachers, and is especially enthusiastic about Mrs. Peterson, who has made herself accessible to him in a more personal way than teachers have previously done. He chose a Christmas gift for her son.

N. (eight years old) has learned a little about a wide variety of things at the Alternative School, which has helped her to find new interests. She enjoyed the extensive art program at the start of the year in Eric's group, loves the museum trips, likes studying French with Dominique, has learned to play soccer, and finds that sewing is a challenging hobby. The school is very responsive to N.'s interests, and tries to include the things she wants to do in the program. The school's flexibility has also made it possible for N. to continue with her participation in the finger-spelling project for deaf and hard-of-hearing children at the San Rafael School that she had begun as a student there.

J. (age 9) says, "I love school so much I wish I could live there."

One day late in the spring of 1973, Jim Compeau took a small group of students to a special school for retarded adults. The alternative school was working out various arrangements for students to work on social service projects as part of their course of study. The students met with the director of this school to hear him describe the activities of the school and to ask questions. Although the youngsters listened as he tried to couch his explanation in polite and at times rather

condescending language, time and again they came back to specific questions about the conditions of the adult students and school procedures. Their questions and comments were probing and trying for the director, who was not accustomed to such frankness and perceptiveness from youngsters. When the group finally departed, a school assistant came out to the parking lot and said to Compeau, "Thanks for coming. Those kids were something.—They're tomorrow!"

Those of us who have spent time with the children of the Pasadena Alternative School are aware that perhaps the school is out of step with the times. But perhaps that's as it should be, because the children we work with today are nothing less than our tomorrow.